

UNDEFEATED BATTLED CHRONICLE

The image is the cover of the manga 'Senri Akatsuki'. It features two main characters: a man with silver hair and a woman with pink hair. The man is in the foreground, wearing a blue and white military-style uniform with gold accents and a red cape. He is holding a long sword. The woman is behind him, also in a military-style uniform with a white top and a blue skirt. The background is white, and on the left side, there is a large, stylized red seal with Japanese characters and a blue diamond-shaped logo. The title 'Senri Akatsuki' is written in a large, bold, black font at the bottom right, with 'ILL.' above it and the artist's name 'AYUMU KASUGA' below it. The overall style is a mix of anime and manga art.

SENRI AKATSUKI 明月千里 春日步 ILL.

Novel Illustrations

UNDEFEATED
BAHAMUT CHRONICLE

神装機竜

バハムイト

4



最弱無敗の

SENRI AKATSUKI
明月千里
●春日步 AYUMU KASUGA

GA文庫

神装機竜

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World

■装甲機竜《ドラグライド》

遺跡から発掘された、古代兵器。

その中でも希少種であり、高い性能を持つものは、神装機竜と呼ばれる。また、装甲機竜の使い手は、機竜使い《ドラグナイト》と呼ばれる。

■遺跡《ルイン》

世界に七つ発見された古代遺跡。装甲機竜《ドラグライド》が発掘されたため、国力を左右する重要な存在として、各国間で繩張り争いが起きている。

■幻神獣《アビス》

遺跡から現れる謎の幻神獣。人類の脅威であり、機竜使いのみが対抗できる。

■終焉神獣《ラグナレク》

ルイズ
ひとつの遺跡に対し一匹のみ存在するという、超常の力を秘めた七匹の幻神獣。

■黒き英雄

正体不明の装甲機竜《ドラグライド》を使い、たった1機で帝国の装甲機竜の約1200機を倒したと言われる伝説の英雄。

■アティスマータ新王国

リーズシャルテの父であるアティスマータ伯が、アーカディア帝国に対して行ったクーデターによって、五年前に建国された国。

■アーカディア旧帝国

世界の五分の一を束ねていた大国。世界最強と謳われた、圧倒的な軍事力を背景に圧政を敷いていたが、クーデターによって滅ぼされた。ルクスとアイリは、この帝国の皇族の生き残り。

■ヘイブルグ共和国

近隣の強国。旧帝国が原因の終焉神獣の討伐をアティスマータに要求している。

Character



■ルクス・アーカディア

滅亡したアーカディア帝国の王子。
『無敗の最弱』と呼ばれる機竜使い。



■リースシャルテ・アティスマータ

アティスマータ新王国の王女。朱の戦姫と呼ばれる。
神装機竜《ティアマト》の使い手。



■フィルフィ・イングラム

イングラム財閥の次女。ルクスの幼馴染みで学園長の妹。
神装機竜《チュボーン》の使い手。



■クルルシファー・エインフォルク

北の大國、ユミル教国からの留学生であるクラスメイト。
神装機竜《ファフニール》の使い手。



■アイリ・アーカディア

旧帝国の皇族の生き残り。
一年生で、ルクスの実の妹。



■セリステア・ラルグリス

『騎士団』の団長である三年生。学園最強と言われている。
四大貴族の公爵家令嬢で、男嫌いとして有名。



■ヘイズ

各国で闇商人と呼ばれ恐れられていた人物。
現在はヘイブルグ共和国で軍師をしているらしい。



■レリィ・イングラム

アカデミー王立士官学園の学園長。フィルフィの姉。



Prologue – The Beginning of Everything

Part 1

Since when did I realize that I was not needed...?

A certain day nine years ago.

Lux attended the banquet held at the Imperial capital, in the autumn when summer had just ended.

A ceremony to ask the Heaven and ancestor to help the Empire win the war and rule the land was being held there for a duration of five days.

There were nearly three hundred nobles gathered in one place, including the ones from the royal family, waiting for the banquet to begin. This was the second time Lux attended such an event.

The huge castle overlooked the illuminated Imperial capital.

The banquet was held at the splendidous and dazzling reception hall which was so beautiful that it looked like something from a fairytale.

However, for some reason, the atmosphere filled Lux's heart with an unsettling feeling.

According to his grandfather Wade who had a good judgement, the Empire, that indiscriminately splurged the country's funds, incurred the ill will of all the citizens.

He himself began to suspect that his father, the Emperor Diseld, possibly no longer harbored affection any towards the seventh Prince.

After entering the castle, his mother finished the greetings and left Lux alone

and went into an another room to attend to the sickly Airi .

Lux was standing alone in the dazzling gorgeous.

“Good evening.”

At that time, someone called out to Lux.

Facing him was a rather short middle-aged man.

With a gentle expression on his face, Dalto introduced himself as his mother's acquaintance.

To be specific, this man's wife who died last year was very close to Lux's mother.

He was the huge merchant who ran the Aingram conglomerate and was about to move to the imperial capital, so he came to say hello.

“Is, that so.”

To the young Lux, these matters were not very interesting .

Lux only exchanged greetings and conversed because he was a member of the imperial family member behavior.

However—

“Then I will introduce you to my daughters. This is my first daughter Relie and this is my second daughter Philphie. This time, I was finally able to bring them over.”

He said pointing to the two young girls in beautiful formal dresses.

“The younger sister Philluffy is the same age as His Highness. As you can see, she is a gentle girl. I hope you will get along well. We will meet again when we visit your mother. ”

Lux bowed his head politely.

“.....Nice to make your acquaintance.”



A girl with childish features in a very well suited light-colored dress, fixed her gaze on Lux with a expressionless face.

Aingram Philluffy .

And with the encounter with the girl with a mysterious aura, the story of these two people began.

Episode 1 – Training Camp

Part 1

「Uu..... I feel sick.....」

The boisterous sound of waves and the cry of sea birds could be heard.

Lux was turning over with a pale face on the bed inside a cabin where sunlight was shining in from a window.

The truth was that it had been a few years since the last time Lux had boarded a ship for real.

Or rather, perhaps this was actually his first time.

There were several occasions when he was helping with carrying and managing ship cargo when he was doing odd jobs at the harbor.

But, this time he wasn't boarding a small ship that was going to fish, but quite a large ship that was heading to a far away destination. Lux had never experienced something like that since he was born.

It was fortunate that there was a cabin for personal use in the ship because the ship was a large military ship of the New Kingdom.

Lux didn't wish to worry his female classmates by showing his pallid face to them, and what's more everyone else seemed to be fine in general, so this problem was also a concern about his personal honor.

「Nii-san. I'm coming in.」

The door of the room was opened after a knocking sound. Lux's little sister Airi showed her face from there.

「Yes..... Airi is all right.....?」

「So there is something else that Nii-san is poor at other than your relationships with woman.」

Lux tried to smile, but he was unable to make a good expression, which caused Airi to smile wryly.

「N, no, it's not like, I'm that weak ab—」

Lux felt mortified because his little sister was all right for some reason despite the two of them being placed in the same environment, so he tried to say his objection, but then,

「I only heard this just now but, because of the sea current and the wind, it looks like our arrival might be delayed for a few days.」

「.....」

Lux's head dropped down dejectedly after seeing Airi's smile.

「I'm lying. It looks like we are going to arrive at the island soon, so how about Nii-san come out to the deck to look at the scenery?」

Lux nodded「Ah, right」at Airi, who was showing a teasing smile, before he stood up.

When he tried to go outside with staggering footsteps, he suddenly became concerned about something and turned his face to Airi.

「Say, Airi. About that girl called Hayes—」

「.....I, don't know anything as well.」

Perhaps expecting Lux's question, Airi answered with a complicated face.

「If what Nii-san saw was correct, then I think that there is almost no doubt that she is one of the imperial family of the Old Empire. But—」

「.....I see.」

A few days ago, the special forces of Heiburg assaulted the Academy.

The Black Marketer, a girl called Hayes was currently placed as the strategist of that Heiburg. Her silver hair and eyes resembled Lux and the others, the

Imperial family of the Old Empire.

When Lux was a child living in the imperial court, he had seen the faces of all the members of the Imperial family of the Old Empire.

But, it was like only the face of that girl named Hayes didn't exist in his memory.

At the coup d'etat five years ago, the Imperial family of the Old Empire died with the exception of Lux and Airi. There shouldn't be other living members of the Imperial family except the two of them.

From the story of queen Raffi of the New Kingdom, not to mention the Imperial family inside the castle, even most of the important people who were related to the Imperial family were assassinated.

Lux's eldest brother, Fugil was the only one whose whereabouts were unknown, but could there be other members of the Imperial family who were still alive?

Lux discussed the matter with Airi, and the other day they sent a secret message to queen Raffi for confirmation, but the reply was still the same as five years ago.

No answer came out even after thinking about it.

Perhaps there would be no other way to find the answer except capturing that girl called Hayes and asking her directly.

「Then, I'll go out in a bit.」

Lux stopped the talk and he climbed up the stair to come out to the deck.

「Uwah.....」

Lux unconsciously held his breath from witnessing the superb view that couldn't be seen at Cross Field Fortress City that was located inland.

The weather was clear without a single cloud in the sky, with the beautiful sea that was reflecting the blue color of the sky on its surface.

And then the dazzling sun of the early summer was highlighting their destination this time clearly.

The island floating in the ocean that was in the New Kingdom's territory, covered with the greenery that was the unique vegetation of the island—Ries Island.

For one week starting from today, Lux and co. would make the boardinghouse on that island as their base.

Part 2

「Special training camp, on Ries Island—is it?」

About three weeks after the Academy selection battle, the early summer of June.

In preparation for the international tournament, the twelve people who were the representatives that would participate in it were gathered inside the waiting room of the practice ground.

There, all the members were told about that proposal instead of the original plan.

「Yes. I heard about it from the board chairman just now, so I'm thinking to hear the opinion of everyone.」

The words of the captain of the Academy's raid squad 『SyvallesKnight Squadron』, Celistia caused the eyes of the noble lady students to shine.

「Hmm. If I remember right, there is a huge practice ground for Drag-Rides on Ries Island. That's a good place for our final preparations towards the international tournament. No objection at all from me here.」

First it was the princess of the New Kingdom Lizsharte who showed her approval about the talk of a training camp.

Starting from the overseas student Krulcifer, Lux's childhood friend Philuffy, the famous trio of the academy, the Triad, and so on, the other selected members also consented one after another, and it was decided in the blink of an eye.

「This will be the first time I'm participating in this kind of event, so I'm looking forward to it. —Lux-kun, what about you?」

「.....I guess. Yes, I'm also looking forward to it.」

Lux was nodding in agreement at Krulcifer's words while showing her a smile, it was at that time

「I'm going to feel bad for everyone in the academy, but it looks like I will be able to spend time with you just the two of us after so long, right?」

「Eh.....?」

Lux felt his heart jump from the mischievous gaze of Krulcifer while his mouth replied like that.

Lisha who saw that cut in between the two of them with a sullen face.

「Oi! What kind of licentious things are you thinking about right now Krulcifer!? Just so you know, Lux is going to help me with my research, or doing Drag-Ride practical tests,anyway I'm going to have him do various things for me there!」

「How vexing. I'm not thinking about anything wicked at all. Rather than that, I want to give you a tiny piece of advice though. I think that there is something wrong if you are working him hard like a horse just because you want to be together with him you know?」

「Kuh..... it, it's not like I want—!」

When Lisha's cheeks were turning red against Krulcifer's cool smile,

「The two of you, I'm still in the middle of talking.」

The serious faced Celis flatly rebuked the two of them.

「This kind of event is rare, so I also understand your feelings of wanting to let loose, but this is a part of our education. Keep in mind not to forget about our duty.」

Her face was the face of a resolute senior that was worthy of the title of the strongest girl of the Academy.

(As I thought, Celis-san is just amazing.....)

Lux breathed out in relieve inside his heart seeing the small quarrel settled down safely.

There was an aspect of Celis that was relatively awkward, but she was

fundamentally a splendid mediator.

Lux was directing such a respectful gaze at her, it was at that time, 「Co, come to think of it, there is something I want to ask Lux regarding the matter of this training camp.」

Celis was asking him like that as though she had suddenly recalled something. 「Yes. What is it?」

When Lux replied back, the academy's strongest girl spoke with a seriousness in her face,

「Tha, that.....I heard that one should carefully choose their spare underwear when they are going for a sleepover with a boy —is that true?」

- murmur-*.....Ripples spread inside the waiting room at that instant.

「Tha, that kind of thing is the first time for me and I don't really get it so, that's, if possible I want to receive advice from Lux who is a boy—」

「No, perhaps that's the misunderstanding of the person who told senpai that, you know!? That's a sleepover in a different meaning you know!?」

When Lux said that in panic,

「Well, in a sense that's not wrong though.」

「.....? What do you mean? Teach me Krulcifer.」

Lisha tilted her head in puzzlement when Krulcifer who was beside her said that.

「Or rather, isn't captain Celis unexpectedly letting loose too in this.....」

When Tillfur muttered that with a complicated face at the end, Celis straightened her posture in panic.

「The, there is no such thing! It's not like I'm thinking something like what kind of game to bring in order to deepen my bond with everyone this time for sure, or anything. Not in the slightest so—」

「Celis, I think that we are still in the middle of the explanation here.....」

When Sharis who was similarly a third year retorted so, Celis's face reddened and she put her breathing in order.

「My, my apologies! E, err..... then I think that everyone is in agreement with this proposal, so let's end this talk for the time being. As soon as the details are settled, we will once more—」

(Senpai's true color is completely showing.....)

The strongest girl who was obstinately protecting the discipline she imposed and was bound by 『rightness』.

But, perhaps thanks to her relying once on Lux, that was a male, and his declaration that he would accept her, it might be that she became relatively able to also show her weak side.

「Oh man, I'm really looking forward to it. Lux-chi is also happy right? You'll be able to have a training camp together with everyone.」

Right after the explanation was over, one of the Triad, Tillfur called out to him with that sentence.

「Yes. I'm also a bit excited. This kind of event with everyone is the first time since I came to this academy—」

「That's right. This experience is also the first time for me, so I'm feeling a bit in high spirit.」

Even Noct who was usually cool and collected among the Triad was showing an unexpected side of her.

「.....Eh? Geez Lux-chi, could it be that you didn't notice?」

「.....?」

Lux tilted his head in puzzlement hearing Tillfur's suggestive sentence.

「Lux-chi is slow as usual at this kind of thing 'innit. Well, doesn't matter. It's something to look forward to later.」

「Yes. I'll also stay quiet until that time.」

(So, somehow I'm getting really worried.....!)

Although Lux felt somewhat uneasy from Noct's whisper, for the time being

they wrapped up the whole talk.

(.....But, I'm glad that I can go outside the academy at this timing.)

The other day, when the academy was assaulted, Lux used his divine Drag-Ride <Bahamut>, but the majority of the students were in chaos and it was the best they could do to evacuate, so with the exception of a small part that was the selection members here, there was no sign that Lux's true identity was exposed.

But, because the rumor of 「Just what is that black Drag-Ride and its Drag-Knight?」 became a hot topic inside the academy for a while, it caused Lux to go through days that were bad for his heart.

He was thinking that it would be great if the rumor calmed down nicely while he was gone to the training camp.

Lux slowly turned his gaze to his side while thinking of such a thing.

Ahead of his gaze there was the face of his childhood friend who possessed beautiful pink hair.

「Training camp. Sounds fun, doesn't it?」

Philuffy said that to him with her face that was still nearly emotionless.

「Ah, yep.....」

Lux also replied back with an awkward smile.

Philuffy was fatigued from the assault on the Academy before this, and so she took a break. But it seemed that her condition had completely recovered, so Lux was relieved about that. Although—

(Ries Island, huh.....)

Lux harbored a complicated feeling towards the name of the place they planned to go to.

And then, on the morning of five days later.

Lux and co. departed to the practice ground of Ries Island using the large military ship of the New Kingdom.

Part 3

The time after the island came into view from the ship went by fast.

The ship approached the pier that was made from stone, the anchor and the cargo were brought down, and then all of them walked through the road in a line.

The path that was surrounded by a grove of tall summer trees gave the image of a green corridor.

「The plants are growing really thick. The path is also rough. The maintenance here is lacking.Good grief.」

When Lisha was grumbling while both her hands were carrying her bag, headmaster Relie who was at the rear of the line started explaining with a smile.

「It's on purpose that there are a lot of plants around here. This place is more or less also a military facility, that's why it's set so that gazes from outside can be avoided as much as possible. And so everyone, be careful not to get lost ok?」

By the way, Ries Island was quiet far from Cross field, so the preparation for this training camp was a bit problematic.

The summoning of Drag-Rides was unable to function if there was too much of a distance.

The nearest Drag-Ride hangar was at the neighboring port city, so the Drag-Rides of the participating members were re-stationed there temporarily. They needed to arrange such things so that they could summon the Drag-Rides on this Ries Island.

「Aah, aah, even though it would be a breeze walking through this kind of path if I could use <Wyvern>」

It was obvious, but the use of Drag-Rides outside of training and emergencies was fundamentally forbidden, even on this island.

Perhaps because of not being accustomed to traveling, even Tillfur of the Triad was muttering about how tiresome it was. It was at that time,

「You can be relieved. Looks like we have arrived already.」

When Lux raised his face at the same time as Krulcifer's calm words—

「Waah.....」

The surprised voices of the girls could be heard from behind Lux.

Ahead of the path that came out of the thick tunnel of leaves, a scene that looked like another world spread out before their eyes.

A spacious practice ground surrounded by thick and steep stone walls could be seen from afar. Right before it, there was a forest that functioned to absorb shockwaves and sounds from the practice ground.

There was also a huge lake and farming area. And not just lodging facilities to be used as a base, but there were also shops lining up, even though small.

Ries Island was originally the military facility of the Old Empire, but during these five years, it seemed that it has changed considerably.

There was also the existence of vegetation that were unique to the island that even gave them the illusion as though they had arrived in another country.

All the students including Lux had their gazes stolen by that scene for a while.

「Oo. Welcome, it's a pleasure to be in your presence, Relie Aingram-sama. I would have come to receive you myself if only you contacted me beforehand.」

A gentle-looking old man who grew a white beard on his face was slowly walking their way.

It seemed that he was the village chief of this island.

「I came here today as headmaster, so please don't worry about it. We will be in your care for a while.」

The village chief greeted Relie warmly. The two of them might be acquainted through the Aingram Conglomerate. After the greeting, Relie received

something like a key and she walked to the front.

「Currently the military personnel aren't using the practice ground, so you all can take it easy here.」

After Relie said that, they walked for a bit before reaching a hut that was the boarding house.

Perhaps because it was originally a lodging facility for the use of the Old Empire's military, the structure of the building was spacious and solid, but when compared to the girl's dormitory of the Academy, as expected it gave off a plain impression.

Even so, when Lux thought back to the period when he was doing chores, it was a building that was enough to be called as splendid.

After Lux put down his luggage, he was about to go help out someone else, it was at that time,

「.....I'm just a bit, tired.」

Airi who finally arrived at the living room of the boardinghouse let out a sigh.

Her personal luggage should only be filled with things related to documents, but it seemed that she was tired from the long trip that she hadn't done in a long time. She was sitting down deeply into the sofa.

「Airi, are you okay? If you feel unwell, then I'll call the doctor of this—」

「I'm fine. Nii-san is always treating me like a child. Even I am already an adult you know?」

「.....Ah, yes. You're right.」

Lux showed a wry smile at Airi's sullen expression while he replied like that.

「Come to think of it, why has Airi come along here?」

「What a heartless brother. Am I not allowed to come along here?」

「No, that's not what I meant. This, it's the training camp for the representative members for the international tournament right? I'm just wondering if it's alright for Airi to come along too.....」

About Airi's accompaniment, it wasn't hard to imagine the headmaster Relie

giving Airi permission using her authority.

However, Lux thought that there wasn't any reason for Airi to purposefully participate in this training camp, but,

「I came to monitor Nii-san.」

Airi replied to Lux's modest question with a nonchalant face.

「Eh?」

「Recently Nii-san flirts with girls too much. It makes me a bit worried that some kind of mistake might happen, that's why I came along here.」

「By mistake you mean.....」

As expected, whatever the circumstances may be he didn't think anything like that would occur.

Since Lux came to the academy, he came to get along well with a lot of girls, including the man-hater Celis. He wanted to think that it wasn't just his conceit but, even so—.

「Err, I'm the only man here, that's why everyone acts kindly to me. That's all there is to it I think.」

「.....」

Lux's sentence caused Airi to stare fixedly at him in exasperation,

「Haa..... I don't know if I should be relieved, or perhaps I should feel uneasy..... Nii-san is Nii-san as expected isn't it.」

「That's, what do you mean—?」

When Lux tried to ask back,

「Airi-chan. Everyone has finished changing already. They are going ahead, so tell Lux-chi too 'kay.」

Tillfur's bright voice could be heard from outside the room.

Airi who heard that let out a light sigh 「Fuu」, and then she handed the bag in her hand to Lux.

「Then Nii-san, change into these clothes and then please go to the coast. If

you go out of the lodging, and then go straight on the right path, you will arrive at that place.]

「Err..... Then, I'm going.」

Lux changed his clothes as he was told while still not really understanding anything, and then he got out of the boardinghouse.

It seemed that Tillfur and the others had changed and gone on ahead, but was the place they were going to the practice ground?

(But, as expected from everyone. For them to practice right after arriving—)

Just as he was told by Airi, he went through the many paths with a lot of vegetation and headed towards the coast.

「But, what's this clothes? It looks different from the suit.....」

The clothes Lux changed into was different from the suit for Drag-Ride use. It was only the size of underwear for the lower body.

.....Was there some kind of mistake perhaps?

For a moment Lux hesitated whether to head back to the boarding house or not, it was at that time—

「Ooooi. Lux-chi, this way, this way—」

He could hear Tillfur's voice from ahead of the narrow path, that was colored by greenery, from the opening of a thicket where sunlight shined in through.

When Lux moved his feet forward following the call, his view suddenly opened up and he could see the coast.

「Sorry. I've made everyone wait—.....eh, eeeeeh!？」

When Lux got down with his hand blocking off the strong sunlight of the early summer, he could see it.



The shining bright beach, and the transparent blue sea.

And then, the girls clad in colorful and vivid outfits who were gathering there.

「You're late, Lux-kun. Everyone is already impatient here.」

The third year Sharis— one of the Triad whose body was clad in small clothes with rose decorations, was smiling elegantly.

「U, uwaaah!? I'm sorry-.....! I, I'm not looking so—」

The exposure rate of the outfit was high, so Lux thought that Sharis was wearing underwear. He tried to avert his gaze in panic.

「No. I judge that your reaction is wrong. Lux-san, our clothing isn't underwear.」

「Eh.....?」

Lux felt puzzled hearing that. He turned his gaze towards the owner of that voice, Noct.

The exposure rate was high, but that outfit with polka dot pattern decorating it really matched the girl's unique atmosphere.

「It's unfortunate for Lux-san, but this isn't underwear.」

「Why did you say it twice!? Or rather, in the first place it's not unfortunate or anything!」

「Uwaa, geez Lux-chi, your mind is dirtyyy. But it's fine you know, we're always indebted to you anyway.」

Even Tilffarr, who was wearing an outfit with yellow sunflower pattern, was sending him a teasing stare. As expected, her outfit was an outfit with slightly high exposure rate compared to the suit she was usually wearing.

「No, it's not like I—」

Lux's face reddened and he was troubled of where to look. When he tried to make an excuse in a hurry,

「It seems that this thing is called a water dress.」

「Eh.....?」

When Lux turned around towards the voice he heard from behind him, there was Krulcifer standing there.

The outfit made from black fabric accompanied with silverwork was bringing into prominence her transient and mystical beauty all the more.

Her smooth skin that was like fresh snow, and those limbs which, while slender, depicted an alluring curve, they caused Lux to gulp his saliva.

「It was from a few years ago, but it seems this outfit is popular among nobility. It's a custom to create and wear outfits for the sake of dressing up yourself when swimming in the ocean. I too am wearing this for the first time in this country but—what do you think?」

Saying that, Krulcifer showed the 『water dressswimsuit』 she was wearing to Lux.

「E, err— it's really beautiful. It completely matches, Krulcifer-san's atmosphere.....」

「You think? Thank you. To hear you say that to me, it's worth it for me to spend time choosing this.」

Krulcifer's face wasn't her usual cool expression, she was acting bashful with a slightly embarrassed face.

That gesture was excessively cute that Lux spontaneously felt his heart jump.

「My my, how nice. It feels like the springtime of youth.」

The headmaster Relie spoke out from under the pavilion to block the sunlight a slight distance away.

Perhaps it should be said as expected, she too was properly wearing the so called water dress.

「.....Wait, even Relie-san is planning to play around!?」

She was the headmaster, someone who was in the position of leading others, and yet she was wearing an outfit with excessive exposure rate that shocked Lux unintentionally.

「My, discrimination is no good you know, Lux-kun. Although I'm the

Academy's headmaster, but I'm also a human. Can you allow me to let my hair down a bit this time as an occasional day off for me?」

「No, if it's Relie-san, I get the feeling that you're already relaxing quite often even usually —I mean this, in the first place we're not here for a holiday.....」

When Lux retorted calmly like that,

「It's just as he says. I cannot allow something like playing right from the first day. In the first place, we came to this island under the pretext of a training camp. We should strive for more seriousness.」

Celistia came beside Lux as though to give backing to those words.

Celis was wearing a light blue water dress with an appearance that was nearly a dress type compared to what the other girls were wearing.

Regardless of the exposure rate that was slightly moderate, the destructive power of that abundant body was sucking in Lux's gaze unintentionally.

「You said that, but even you are properly wearing a water dress here aren't you?」

「This is only because the headmaster(you) tricked me saying that this was for swimming practice!」

「Haa, you're stubborn as usual..... Working hard is important, but this time it will be a long training, so don't you think that a bit of a breather is also important? Right, Lux-kun.」

「Lux. You too, please say something to the headmaster. This kind of conduct cannot be tolerated.」

「Eh.....!? Celis-senpai is also turning on me!?」

Honestly speaking, he was really poor at making a decision for a problem that affected more than himself.

What to do.

Certainly Celis's opinion made sense, but he didn't think that she would win against Relie by reasoning—.

(Aa.....)

At that time, suddenly a silhouette entered the corner of Lux's sight.

After giving a glimpse at that figure, Lux immediately determined himself.

「Eerr, Celis-senpai. Certainly I think that training is also important, but isn't it also fine to spend a bit of time with everyone right now?」

Celis showed a vaguely sullen looking face hearing Lux's polite proposal.

「You are a kind person, but you are a bit soft towards everyone. In order to obtain many victories in the international tournament, desperate effort is necessary—」

「Then, how about loosening up our bodies by swimming a bit before doing hand-to-hand combat training? The ground here is also soft sand, and it will also become warm up until we use Drag-Rides.」

Lux skillfully pacified Celis who was obstinate to the last.

「..... Is, that so?」

「Yes! I think that's so! Besides look, Celis-senpai too, you look really good in that water dress. You don't need to be that bothered about the gazes of the surrounding—」

Lux pressed on when he saw Celis was wavering, at that time,

「Wha-.....!? What are you saying-!? Ple, please don't say strange things! It, it's not like, I want to change clothes quickly because I'm not used to this outfit and it feels embarrassing. It's nothing like that at all I'm telling you!」

(S, so that was it.....)

Lux pushed those words down into his throat and he smiled awkwardly.

「—I understand. In deference to you, I'll allow this just for today. But, don't forget that this too is the extension of training. A, also, it's prohibited to oggle intently at me.」

Lux felt relieved hearing Celis's words while turning around to everyone behind him.

「Geez Lux-chi, you're working hard like that, because you want to look at everyone's swimsuits.」

「Yes. But, I think that's understandable. After all, even Lux-san has sexual desires inside him.」

「He casually guides the conversation to carry out hand-to-hand combat training while we are dressed like this..... Lux-kun, you too, are a strategist, huh.」

The Triad said those things one after another.

「Even though I did my best for everyone, that's cruel you know-!?」

The teased Lux reflexively complained with a troubled look, it was then,

「.....ei」

「Wah.....-!?」

Suddenly Lux's back was splashed with water along with a girl's absent-minded voice.

When he turned around hurriedly, he found Philuffy in a water dress standing there, dipping inside the sea where the water reached until under her knees.

「.....Is it cold, Lu-chan?」

Lux's childhood friend showed a faint smile slightly inside that usual expressionless face.

But, rather than the surprise from getting splashed by water, it was Philuffy's appearance that Lux's attention was directed to.

The light green water dress decorated with flower patterns had a lot more exposure rate compared to the pilot suit Philuffy usually wore, that bewitching springy white thighs, and the soft-looking breast valley, and so on were being emphasized.

「Us playing together in the sea. This is the first time.」

「Ah, yes.....」

The face of Lux who replied half-heartedly like that was getting heated naturally.

When the two of them were children, he had played at the shallows of a river bank with Philuffy several times. Various things right now couldn't be compared

with that time.

The face that still had vague traces of childishness in it, with a voluptuous figure that stimulated male instinct.

In spite of that, it was only Philuffy's attitude towards Lux that was still the same as in the past. For some reason that felt really nostalgic for Lux.

「Fuu..... I was able to imagine it but, when we came to this kind of place..... as expected this girl completely makes me feel inferior.」

Krulcifer who saw that said so with a complicated face.

「Tha, that's not true you know!? E, even me, it's not like I'm only looking at that kind of place of everyone—」

「My? I wonder where are you looking at on my little sister's body? Can you tell me in more detail, Lux-kun?」

When the startled Lux tried to make an excuse in panic, Relie came teasing him even more.

「Ra, rather than that, I don't see Lisha-sama anywhere—」

「I, I'm right here!」

When Lux ran his gaze to the surroundings, he could see Lisha's figure under another pavilion that wasn't used by Relie.

「.....Eh? What are you doing there, Lisha-sama?」

From what he saw it seemed that she had changed into a water dress, but she was hiding her body with a thin towel and stayed motionlessly in the shadow of the pavilion.

「Co, come here for a bit. I'll explain the circumstance to you.....」

Beckoned by Lisha, Lux approached her. Lisha was sitting down wearing a vividly crimson water dress the same color as her eyes.

Her waist was wrapped with red decorative fabric, but the exposure rate of the outfit was fundamentally high.

「Do, don't stare so much at me!? That's embarrassing.....」

「Aa— could it be」

Lux finally noticed belatedly.

「Tha, that's how it is. The area around my stomach is visible more than I thought, that—」

There was a mark that was branded on Lisha's abdomen by the Old Empire in the past.

That secret was originally something that mustn't be known by anyone.

The mark was being hidden by the fabric tied on her waist, but there was a chance that it could be exposed if she made a big movement.

「No, actually it would be better if I didn't change into these clothes but..... How should I say it, swimming in the sea looks fun, so I was careless.....」

Lux smiled wryly seeing Lisha whispering shamefully.

Lisha was usually working hard at fighting and in developing Drag-Rides, but she also had a desire that was appropriate for her age.

「I understand. But, that water dress, it looks really cute you know?」

「Wha-.....!? What are you saying!? Thi, this lecher!」

Lux returned a smile at Lisha who became bright red and panicked before he went out of the pavilion.

And then, he decided about something for the sake of the frustrated Lisha while returning to where everyone was, it was at that time,

「Ah—」

「Hello, I've been waiting, Nii-san.」

Airi who had changed into a water dress finally arrived at the sandy beach.

Airi's dainty and ephemeral atmosphere really suited her pure white water dress.

However different from the past when she was frail and sickly, her body build was healthy and as appropriate for a girl her age.

「So Airi also changed into such an outfit, just as I thought.」

Lux abruptly smiled seeing his currently grown up little sister when he recalled about the past.

That was the feeling of relieve as the big brother, but,

「Nii-san, you said just as I thought, don't tell me, has Nii-san been imagining about how I look in a water dress all this time?」

「You're wrong!? Like that, won't I become a person who is bad in various meanings!? That's not what I meant. Just now, you were watching this way while hesitating right? You were at a loss of whether to come here to play together, or else—」

「.....So Nii-san noticed.」

Yes.

When they were talking about whether they should train together with Celis or play at the sea, Lux could see Airi's figure at afar spying this way.

There, Lux thought to skillfully guide the development to a direction where everyone would play together at the sea.

「But I'm glad. Like this you can play together with everyone.」

In this training camp, Airi who was unable to use a Drag-Ride would record the Drag-Ride's output from outside, decipher the ancient documents from the Ruins, and many other tasks where she would be doing it alone.

Even if it would be for the sake of the training camp, but no matter what it would surely be lonely and boring for Airi.

That was why Lux decided that he wished Airi could at the very least play with everyone on the first day and he took a plunge.

「For me to be fussed about by the insensitive Nii-san, for some reason it feels like I'm defeated.」

Airi puffed up her cheeks slightly and she muttered with a complicated face.

But,

「And yet, that consideration makes me happy, just a little. That's why, today I'll play with Nii-san for a bit.」

Airi smiled at Lux with a voice that sounded just a bit embarrassed.

「.....Looks like, I too am still immature as a leader.」

Celis suddenly muttered so from behind.

「Relaxing at least on the first day we arrived is it, but, just in case everyone should warm up their bodies lightly. The having fun will be after that.」

「Yes. Please.」

It seemed that Celis also changed her thinking after seeing the exchange between Lux and Airi.

「Then, please quickly gather the members who can move. It will be free time after we have a bit of a run along the sea.」

The leader Celis gave that order.

「Yes-!」

Like that, the eleven members other than Lisha replied with anticipation of having fun after that.

.....But.

Right after that, everyone present including Lux came to a realization. The words “a bit” and “light” that came from Celis who habitually accumulated training steadily while treating herself strictly, actually referred to training on a level that was honestly wearisome even for Lux.

Although Airi tried to keep up at the beginning, she then quickly escaped to where headmaster Relie was. Lisha who was only observing was also relieved.

In the end, they were able to have fun at the sea an hour later.

Part 4

「Haaa..... I'm tireeed. I want to have a nap just for a bit hereee.」

After running on the beach, there was swimming practice that was accompanied by only spirit and without skill.

And then after the long-awaited water play was over, everyone returned to the inn and ate box lunches, as the day progressed into the afternoon.

Continuing after that, everyone began to look around inside the island's facilities following the schedule. It was at that time that Tillfur yawned and let out a complaint.

「No. I judge that you were too high-spirited in having fun, Tillfur. You were also playing too much with your all when the training was over.」

「It feels wasteful to rest after we finally finished the training don't'cha think!?」

The leader among the three, Sharis, lightly tapped a shoulder of Tillfur who responded to Noct's report.

「By the way, you haven't forgotten that there was also a plan for light practice after we finished with this looking around, have you?」

Lux reflexively smiled wryly seeing Tillfur's shoulders drop down in dejection.

Everyone walked in one line through the neglected narrow path that was illuminated by the sunlight filtering through trees.

The scenery of the island that possessed a lot of trees and ground undulations varied depending on the location.

「There is also a farm here. It's so big you won't think that this is an island that has a practice ground.」

Relie casually replied 「Right」 at Celis's muttering and she lifted her face.

「That's because in the past there were a lot of people here, although now there isn't that many people.」

Lux guessed that she must be talking about the period of the Old Empire.

This place was used as the army's practice ground, as the testing site for military weapons—and also as a base nearby a Ruin.

The facility that was well-ordered more than ten years ago changed shape and it was taken over by the New Kingdom.

From Relie's explanation, at their left side were a forest and a farm area, a large water reservoir, the practice ground, a Drag-Ride atelier, a small hangar, and then—

「By the way, the best thing here is the hot spring. It will take a bit more time until we can enter it, but this time it will be reserved just for us, so all of you can heal you fatigue from training there.」

The training camp members were excited hearing that unexpected news.

「Waa..... It will be my first time entering a hot spring!」

「We can really do that!?」

「Reservation, that's really a surprise. But, there should be other people on this island, too. Just how in the world—」

Seeing the students of SyvallesKnight Squadron become high spirited, Relie smiled and then said a short sentence.

「You use the power of money for that.」

Hearing that caused the faces of everyone to turn really complicated with mixed feelings.

(As expected, it's just like Relie-san to do something like that.....)

As might be expected from the Aingram conglomerate that was one of the prominent wealthy groups even in the New Kingdom, the way they used money was pointlessly amazing.

In Lux's memory about when he was a child, he recalled about the birthday party of the little sister Philuffy that was celebrated in an excessively large party

hall with a gigantic cake prepared for the occasion.

He believed that at the time Relie was also still young, but her personality hadn't change since that time.

「If everyone is in agreement, it's fine for Lux-kun to enter together you know?」

「Wha-.....!？」

Relie said that with a mischievous face.

「Tha, that's, as expected that's a bit.....」

「Wha, what are you saying headmaster!? Such licentious—」

When the panicked Lux and Celis reflexively protested,

「You mean while wearing water dresses right, headmaster Relie?」

Krulcifer smoothly guessed so from the side.

「My? Even though I wanted to tease them for a little bit more, Krulcifer-san, you exposed the joke too fast.」

「I see, if it's wearing a water dress then.....」

For a moment Lux almost consented, but,

「No that's still no good you know!? Even if we are wearing water dresses—」

After thinking really, really carefully, Lux shook his head in panic.

Although they were water dresses, in the end it didn't change the fact that everyone would be lightly dressed.

It felt like his head would boil just from hearing the fact of beautiful girls entering bath.

「That's regrettable.」

「Are you really..... a headmaster?」

Lisha retorted with an exasperated expression and the talk was somehow settled there.

「Then, for the time being how about we look around? The facility here that is

introduced right now—」

Following Relie's words, they looked around the facilities that gave off historical impressions in order.

It seemed the military of the New Kingdom wouldn't come here in this one week, but it appeared that every facility was still properly attended to by its supervisor, guard, and so on.

Even on the inside of the Drag-Ride atelier was fairly in order, making Lisha's eyes to shine.

「We are going to finish looking at everything soon. Then, let's practice lightly before we end the day.」

Following Relie's instructions, they headed towards the practice ground for the last time today.

「.....」

Midway, Lux caught sight of an out of shape building above a small hill.

The name of the last facility that Lux knew, didn't come out of his mind.

Part 5

And then, the light practice was over in the blink of an eye, and the night of the first day of the training camp arrived.

Different from Cross Field, there were few buildings and street lights on Ries Island, so the night was dark.

Everyone gathered in the spacious living room of the boardinghouse to take dinner but, 「By the way board chairman, why didn't you call for a cook for the training camp this time? Even though we could save time and effort if you did that from the start.」

「My, making the food with everyone at this kind of time suits the mood more, you know?」

Relie responded with a smile at Lisha's question.

「But.....Relie-san, I don't remember but, can you cook?」

When Lux said that while reeling in his memories of the past,

「There is no way I can.」

「I knew it.....」

Lux could only look astonished when he was told that by the widely smiling Relie.

「Anyway, we brought the ingredients and seasoning here so it looks like we have everything. With this, we will be able to make something somehow don't you think?」

Krulcifer took a glance at the kitchen and the ingredients storage before she muttered.

「Lux-kun. Could you help me for a bit?」

「Ah, yes.」

It appeared that the one who was skilled in cooking among the noble ladies was Krulcifer who possessed the spirit of self-reliance since the past. It was also amazing how she reserved her stamina properly even after the training.

「I'll also help. I'm still not really good at cooking but,」

Celis made that offer, but,

「Please stop Celis-san!」

The students who were in the third year like her stopped Celis with their all.

「Wh, why!? Even though I look like this but I too am quite—」

「Because we realized it at our expedition to the capital before this! We are begging you, please don't break various things anymore!」

It felt terrifyingly uneasy from what could be seen from that exchange.

「But, we are still short of hands in order to cook for the portion of 14 people. Is there anyone else that can help?」

「I also, can cook you know?」

The one who raised her hand silently was Philuffy who was watching the course of events absentmindedly until now.

「By the way, I wonder what cooking you are good at?」

「Something like baking hotcakes, or cookies. Also, I can cook donuts too you know?」

「I'm happy with just your feeling of wanting to help.」

That was so.

Philuffy had matchless fondness for sweet things. Furthermore she was a big eater.

Perhaps Krulcifer imagined the dinner table would be filled to the brim with sweets because she quickly declined Philuffy's help too.

「Excuse me Krulcifer. In the past, the cook in my house praised me that I'm good at decorating though.....」

Celis called out once more. Perhaps it was frustrating for her to not do

anything.

「I hope you can talk with cooking as the base judgment at the very least.....」

In the end, it was Lisha who wasn't used that much to cooking who was helping out.

The cooking was finished half an hour later and everyone had dinner.

Considering that this was the first time that they were cooking together with everyone in the kitchen, the result was adequate.

Even so perhaps because everyone's stomach was empty from exercising the whole day, when the meal was started there was almost no conversation.

Ten minutes later, the contents of the plates were cleaned up leaving nothing behind.

「Fuu.....」

When the meal was finished and they took a breather, everyone started to relax inside the spacious living room.

Airi was reading a book she brought, while Noct was playing chess with another girl. Sharis and Tillfur were betting cards where they then got scolded by Celis.

Relie was emptying a bottle of wine, where as Philuffy was eating a cookie while accompanying her.

Lisha was spreading the blueprints of a Drag-Ride above the table and thinking about something.

Lux who finished tidying up the tableware was watching all that while he was enveloped in a mysterious sensation.

「Somehow, this kind of thing is nice.」

Such words leaked out subconsciously from Lux's mouth.

He also spent time together with the girls during their classes everyday or at the girl's dormitory, but spending time together with school friends the same age as him inside the same room like this made him feel like his yearning in the past was fulfilled.

「Certainly, it's also not bad doing something like this occasionally.」

Perhaps Krulcifer also felt the same because she said so while sitting beside him.

「Yes. It will be great if we can also win the international tournament and finish everything safely like this without any incident but—」

「Right. And then, I'll also pray so that your anxiety can be taken care of if possible.」

「Eh.....?」

Lux's heart pulsed heavily from hearing Krulcifer casually whispering suggestively to him.

She was right on the mark.

Since Lux arrived on this island, he had been bothered by something all this time. It wouldn't leave his mind.

「How, did you—」

「It's not something I can really brag about. For a long time I was living by covertly examining people's expressions, that's all there is to it.」

Krulcifer was discovered inside the Ruins of the Ymir Theocracy, she was then adopted by the Einvolk family and lived there until now.

Because she was raised in other people's family and wasn't allowed to relax her guard around anyone, she excelled in seeing through the subtlety of people's hearts.

Surely that was the kind of meaning her words had.

「Since you arrived on this island, you looked restless somewhere inside you. You've been worrying about something all this time. It would be great if it's just my needless anxiety though.」

「.....It's nothing at all. It's a matter of the past. Right now it's already—」

Lux showed a powerless smile while answering like that.

Krulcifer calmly smiled, then her fingertips gently reached out and caressed Lux's cheek.

「You don't have to say the reason. But please remember this. If you wish it, I will come help you risking my life anytime. I want you to remember that much.」

「Krucifer, san.....」

Lux's heart was struck by those words and he unintentionally stiffened.

「Oi! What are you two doing in the living room where everyone is!? Be, besides Lux. If you have free time, help me right now—」

When Lisha, who saw the exchange between the two, cut in spontaneously,「Ah.....」

Lux suddenly hit the palm of his hand, then he said towards everyone who was currently relaxing.

「I'm sorry. There is work that I've to do after this for a bit, I'm going to step outside temporarily.」

After saying that as the preface, Lux rushed towards Lisha and then quietly whispered into her ear.

「Wha, what? You need something from me?」

「Lisha-sama. Can I ask you to accompany me for a bit after this?」

Lux told her that with a bright smile on his face.

Part 6

The calm sound of waves was echoing at the sandy beach that was illuminated by moonlight.

The night of the early summer was warm. Even when one was dressed nearly naked, they wouldn't feel cold by any means.

「.....」

Lux and Lisha, who was wearing a water dress, came to the same beach where everyone was playing at during the afternoon.

They both dipped into the sea until the water reached above their knees, tasting the sensation of the gentle waves surging in.

「Is something wrong, Lisha-sama?」

「.....No, how should I say it, I'm a little surprised.」

Lisha averted her gaze from Lux while she embarrassedly fixed the placement of her swimsuit.

「As I thought, isn't this appearance strange on me?」

「That's not true at all Lisha-sama, I think you look really cute.」

「-.....!？」

When Lux said that with a smile, Lisha was startled and her cheeks blushed.

The moon and stars that were reflected on the water surface were shining like scattered gems.

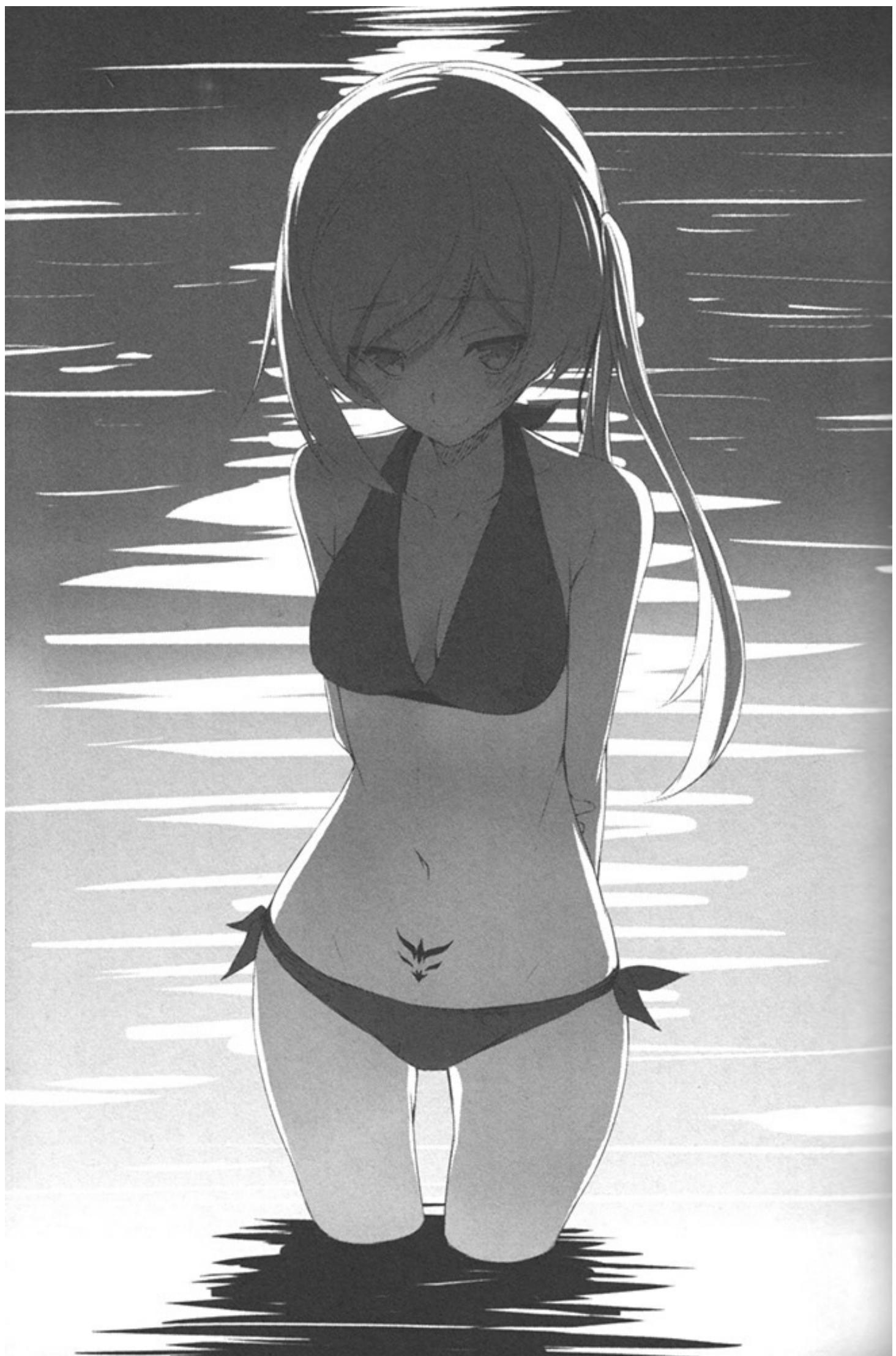
The white figure of Lisha was reflected among that wondrous scene and highlighted her presence.

「I, I see..... When I heard you tell me to wear my water dress and come to the beach, I wondered what you were planning to do but.....」

「Lisha-sama had also expressly bought a water dress for coming here, so I was thinking that perhaps I could play together with Lisha-sama. After all, if it's me I know about the mark on your stomach, so there is no problem. And if it's at night like right now—」

Even if anyone saw from afar, it wouldn't stand out in this dimness.

Making that conclusion, Lux tried inviting Lisha, who was only secluding herself alone during the afternoon while under a pavilion, to come play at this time as much as she wanted.



「I thought that surely Lisha-sama wanted to have fun, because you had even picked out a water dress.」

「.....N, no, I picked a water dress, because I wanted to show it to yo—I, I didn't say anything-!？」

Lisha was about to say something with a small voice, but midway she went bright red and denied it in a panic.

「.....Could it be, I'm being a bother to you?」

「Tha, that's not true! That's—thank you, Lux.」

When Lisha-said that mutteringly, Lux stroked down his chest in relief and he showed a smile.

This princess had a childish side somewhere in her, but she was a confident and adorable princess. That was what Lux thought.

「Besides, I also wanted to look properly, at that water dress—」

Different from the afternoon, this time Lisha's mark under her navel wasn't being hidden by a cloth wrapped around her waist.

Therefore, Lisha panicked when she realized how high the exposure rate of her appearance was right now.

「E, even though I'm a bit moved here, you lecher!」

「Uwah!？」

Lisha splashed sea water on Lux to hide her shyness.

「Fuh, I'll do this to a guy like you! Don't think that you've won just because you're better in a Drag-Ride.」

「I got it. Then I too—!」

Like that, both of them played by splashing water at each other at a depth where the water reached until their knees.

The sea water that was slightly cold felt pleasant on their bodies that still felt the heat from the afternoon temperature and the training.

「Yosh! You're cornered Lux!oops」

「Dangerous-!？」

Lisha's body was suddenly unbalanced. Lux hurriedly caught her body in his arms.

「Are you okay, Lisha-sama!？」

「Ah, yes..... I'm all right. My leg is only a bit sprained—」

「Please stay still. We have to get out of the water and take a look at it thoroughly.....」

Lux held Lisha's back with one arm, while his other arm lifted her up from behind her knees.

It wasn't that hard to do that because from the start she had a petite stature.

Lisha spontaneously became red faced due to the posture as though she was treated like a princess inside a story.

「O, oi Lux. This posture, it feels embarrassing somehow.....」

「No, it's no good if we don't take precautions.」

Lux ignored her and he advanced forward.

Midway, Lux noticed that Lisha's entranced face was near him and he became embarrassed. When he averted his gaze slightly to the side, 「Wah.....!？」

「Wha, what's wrong Lux?」

「Ah, no, nothing—」

Lux avoided the question in panic while he continued walking.

(This, this posture, Lisha-sama's breast touched—)

That was so.

Lisha's breast that was growing well for her small stature touched the chest of Lux who was holding her in his arms. He felt that soft sensation through the water dress.

In addition the white cleavage that was wet from sea water was also near his face, his male instinct was getting conscious of it automatically.

(Wha, what am I thinking!? Right now Lisha-sama's injury is—) Lux denied his

worldly desire. He then made Lisha sit on the beach and took a look at her leg.

Fortunately she really only had a light sprain and it seemed the pain also receded quickly.

「I, I'm glad. It's nothing serious.」

「Ye, yep..... But, like before, just a bit more—」

「Eh.....?」

「No, nothing at all! Ra, rather than that.....」

「Yes. What is it?」

When Lux asked calmly, Lisha hesitated a little and she looked down.

「That.....can I, ask something a bit selfish to you, again?」

「I don't mind, though why would Lisha-sama ask something like that to me?」

With hesitation on her face, Lisha averted her eyes from the puzzled Lux.

「That's, recently when I'm looking at you, I was thinking. You're certainly a reliable man, but just because you will listen to anything I ask, someone immature like me isn't facing my duty as the princess of the New Kingdom, am I not just using you as I please.....」

「.....」

She was someone who was abandoned by her real father, Count Atismata who was lauded as a great man, she then swore to obey the Old Empire, but after that, due to adverse fortune, she gained the seat of the New Kingdom's princess.

Because of that she had an inferiority complex and reluctance in behaving as a princess, but even so she was trying to face herself.

For her to say the words 『the princess of the New Kingdom』, most likely the 『selfishness』 she mentioned was something related to the New Kingdom.

Then—

「It's not like Lisha-sama to be considerate of me.」

Lux made a smile that was filled with deep affection and stated so.

「Eh.....?」

「I am a criminal that has to accept the requests from the citizens but, I'm not doing the work just because of duty. I'm fighting by my own will.」

「—You're right.」

Lisha let out a sigh of relieve and she puffed out her chest.

「It's just as you say. It's not like me to keep being indecisive! Then right away, starting tonight we are going to do the practical test for the new weapon that has been warming up for many years! Commence the experiment!」

「Somehow I feel uneasy from the words at the end there though!？」

Lux was feeling a tinge of unease towards the fully confident Lisha. A few minutes later, the two of them changed clothes, and then they headed towards the island's Drag-Ride atelier.

Episode 2 – Special Mission

Part 1

The dark and deep realm of memory.

The continuation of that day, nine years ago when he met Philuffy for the first time.

The scene of the life inside the Imperial Capital of the Old Empire was replayed inside Lux's dream.

The head of the Aingram conglomerate who was an old friend of Lux's mother—Dalt. Lux thought that their encounter with each other would only be that one time.

But, perhaps because Dalt started his business with the Imperial Capital as his base, he often made his appearance at the residence that could even be called as a palatial residence near the castle.

Each time he visited, his two daughters—Relie and Philuffy also came, but for some reason Lux couldn't compose himself towards them.

Relie was a girl who was cheerful and mischievous, but perhaps because there was a difference in age between her and Lux, or perhaps it was because she had apprehensions towards Lux who was a royalty, she behaved as a 『nice big sister』 towards him.

But, the girl called Philuffy who was the same age as him was a silent person where she was mostly expressionless. Lux couldn't understand what she was

thinking.

His father who was apathetic towards him.

How he was thought as a worthless existence.

Perhaps it was because of those that he was hesitating to call out from his end.

But, he could see that the big sister Relie was really pleased and affectionate to her little sister.

「Lux-kun too, please get along with her. Even though Phi look like this, but she is a really interesting kid you know?」

「Yes.」

That was how he answered at that time, but even when the two of them were left alone with each other, they didn't particularly play with each other.

Even Lux was only making idle and inoffensive talk like 「The weather today is nice isn't it?」 or 「What is your father doing?」, while Philuffy too was only eating the sweets she was carrying or returned a short reply like 「Nn.....」.

A silent child without any ups or downs in her emotions.

Lux's first impression towards Philuffy was something like that.

At the time, Lux's experience of playing with boys of the same age as him was practically zero.

There was also the fact that the age of his siblings in the imperial family was a bit distanced from him, but the biggest cause lied elsewhere.

The emperor's wives numbered six people in total, but their children were contesting for the right of succession to the throne against each other, and the youngest brother Lux was the target to be looked down by them.

It was only the first imperial prince Fugil who was different, but for Lux who at the time was a child, Fugil was a far away existence.

Because he was being taught by a private tutor and a lot of the time he was staying at the side of the frail and sickly Airi, Lux almost had no chance to go outside.

Lux was a 『male』 that possessed the qualifications to be the next emperor.

However, he was the seventh imperial prince whose position was the weakest among all the candidates.

Although the maid, butler, and the soldiers of the imperial court would serve him, but that was the extent of his relationship with them.

With all those circumstances overlapping, Lux mostly spent his time at the library of the imperial court.

He was a figurehead prince. By no means could he come into contact with the center of the Empire, his fate was to become a tool of the emperor and someone who someday would succeed the emperor.

He was thinking that he didn't mind that.

As long as his beloved mother was at his side, and his sickly little sister became healthy.

He was also a bit curious about the girl named Philuffy, but that was all.

She was a daughter of a conglomerate, but she was different from the imperial family.

Philuffy, too, was staying beside Lux right now because of the circumstances of her father's work, but the more time passed, they would notice that Lux didn't have considerable utility value and they would surely lose interest in him then.

Lux was thinking so in his childish heart.

But one day, a turning point suddenly arrived.

About a week since he encountered Philuffy, a large sized work of art was sent to the imperial court.

It was a sculpture of a spirit that was worshipped on the holy birthday of the Empire.

A sculpture of the figure of a very young girl wearing mysterious and unique clothing that couldn't be seen anywhere else.

It was an epic work that was decked out with gold, silver, and gems, and

created by employing a first rate artisan.

Several years was needed to make it. For the Arkadia Empire it was considered to be an important treasure. The sculpture was scheduled to be stored in the castle's warehouse until the holy birthday ten days later.

The sculpture was showed to Lux and Philuffy once when it was delivered, but after that they had never stopped by at the castle warehouse.

But on the afternoon of that day, after Lux borrowed a book in the library, when he was walking inside the castle, he heard a sound nearby the warehouse.

「Oi, what're we going to do? At this rate, we're going to receive some kind of punishment—」

「Aa, it'd be bad if we leave it like this. But, it's also impossible to play dumb about it. Then—the best thing to do is to blame it on someone else.」

It was the voice of boys that Lux was familiar with.

They were boys who were three years older than Lux.

Lux felt a strange atmosphere from their tense voice and he approached.

「What are you doing, elder brother?」

「U, uwah.....!? Wha, what, it's you, don't startle us.」

It was the sixth imperial prince, Lux's brother from a different mother, Abel, and also his best friend Ragreed who came from high nobility.

According to their explanation, the supervisor forgot to lock the warehouse. Then when Abel and Ragreed tried to touch the decoration of the sacred statue for the holy birthday, a part of the statue became chipped.

「We have to quickly tell someone and get it repaired. There should still be time until the holy birthday—」

Lux turned around in panic. It was at that time Abel's hand caught Lux's shoulder.

「Wait there, you are a brat like always huh. You see, for something like this, the order of things is important. At this rate, this will become our fault right?」

Lux got a bad premonition the moment this brother who was older than him said that.

「Fortunately, there is nobody else other than us who saw what happened.」

「Don't tell me, are you planning to stay quiet? But, at this rate.....」

When Lux quietly objected, Abel snorted as though making a fool of him.

「You are really an idiot. I'm saying that we're going to lay the blame on someone else. It's nice timing that at this time there are several children of the guests coming to our place right?」

「—That daughter of the merchant called Aingram or something, isn't she just right for this?」

「.....!?」

Hearing what Ragreed spoke, for a moment Lux's mind became blank.

His expression cramped reflexively and his voice became high-pitched from agitation.

「Such thing—how can that be allowed?」

「That girl isn't even royalty, and she is just a girl anyway.」

Abel's words cut down Lux's argument in a single stroke. Lux was speechless.

「Her family is richer than mine, she is an eyesore so this is perfect timing. What's more that girl, she is mute and absentminded, even when she is called there is almost no reaction. She must be an idiot. She is perfect to get deceived.」

「Yeah, that's right. It's perfect, she came at the right timing. Oi Rag, take her here using any kind of excuse. She must be in the courtyard.」

Ragreed nodded at Abel's command and he started running while laughing.

In order to lay the blame on Philuffy who didn't know anything.

「Such thing, such thing is.....」

「What is it, Lux. You, even though you are the youngest, you're going to go against me?」

Abel glared and yelled threateningly.

「But, such thing.....」

「Hah, you don't get it at all. Listen. In this Empire, something like a woman is just a tool. Their role is to devote their all to us men, give birth to children, and make us feel good. What's more, that girl isn't royalty, but just the daughter of someone who has a bit of money. Just something like this won't be a big deal.」

「.....」

Lux understood how it became like this.

The custom of the empire that was propagating absolute male chauvinism.

Abel who was one of the imperial family was also following that common sense without questioning it.

No, even among the others, Abel was disdaining woman excessively and tended to degrade them.

He was doing every kind of harassment and insult towards his little sisters who were similarly royalty like him and the maids. The surroundings feared what would happen when he became an adult.

A big part of the reason of his attitude was likely because of his position that was far away from the throne succession right, furthermore he wasn't blessed with any talent at all and he lamented about his situation, and so he vented his resentment to the surroundings.

Especially in a situation like this time, the possibility of Abel retracting his previous remarks was as good as nonexistent.

「You get it? You stay quiet, Lux..... Oh, here they come.」

Abel grabbed Lux's shoulder and hid in the shadows inside the warehouse.

And then, Philuffy was brought in. It appeared that Ragreed was hinting that the sacred statue looked strange, so she should try touching it, and so on.

「Never mind that, I told you just touch it. Come on, do it.」

「.....」

Philuffy was expressionless, so it was hard to understand what she was

thinking, but most likely she was perplexed right now. Because she was hurried, in the end her hand reached out to the statue.

At that moment, Ragreed pushed hard on Philuffy from behind and caused her head to hit the statue.

「.....-!？」

Lux saw that sight and he reflexively held his breath, it was at that time, 「Oi. You too match your story with us, you understand?」

When Able said that, at the same time he dropped the fragment of the statue ornament his hand was holding on the floor.

- kachin!* High-pitched metallic sound echoed inside the warehouse, immediately following that—

「Oi, you! How dare you break this sacred statue!」

「Now you've done it. How about apologizing honestly huh?」

Abel who jumped out from behind the cover and Ragreed declared that.

「.....?」

On the other hand, Philuffy was silently rubbing her forehead that hit the statue while tilting her head in puzzlement seeing the boys.

And then, she was staring fixedly at the hand of Abel and Ragreed.

「It's useless even if you play dumb and pretend ignorance. After all we are the witness.」

Abel smiled faintly and told Ragreed to go call the head butler of the palace.

The best friend Ragreed nodded in response and started running through the corridor inside the castle.

「Kuh.....!」

(.....What to do!?)

Lux looked at Philuffy and pondered.

Surely Abel and Ragreed wouldn't stop anymore now that they had raised this

much commotion.

No matter what they were planning to push the blame on Philuffy.

The current Lux didn't have any way to stop that.

(But, there is no way something like this is okay. Doing this to her who doesn't know anything is—) Lux bit his lips and clenched his small fist tightly, at that time, 「Are you speaking the truth? That the sacred statue is broken—」

A man in his prime who was the head butler arrived in panic.

And then, he walked toward Philuffy who was standing still in front of the statue and questioned her.

「I heard that you seem to be the one who did this, is it correct? In that case—」

「That's right. That girl might lie, but we saw it without doubt! That girl slipped and her head hit the statue, breaking that part—」

「..... I am—」

Philuffy was about to say something with her usual expressionless face, it was at that time, 「—I, did it.」

Lux's voice echoed inside the cold metallic warehouse.

「Wha-.....!？」

First it was his big brother's best friend who raised a shocked voice, after that the head butler knitted his eyebrows.

「Is that, the truth?」

「Yes..... The warehouse was not locked, so I entered, and then when I touched the statue accidentally, the statue was.....」

「What about the testimony that said it was the daughter of the Aingram house who did it?」

「I was scared to tell someone that I broke it and stayed silent, but then that girl came here so.....」

「Hmm.....」

The head butler muttered and he ran his gaze at everyone there.

The head butler who was called as relatively a man of character inside the imperial court was pondering for a while. And then he nodded.

「Is that so, I see.....」

He showed a face that was somewhat questioning, but there was no proof whatsoever.

Before long the head butler let out a small sigh and he turned his face toward Lux.

「By all rights, it's only proper to have you receive a scolding from your father his majesty the emperor, but his majesty is a very busy person. I will leave the handling of this case to your mother and private tutor. Is that agreeable with you, Lux-sama?」

「Yes..... Forgive me.」

The head butler said that he would call the artisan for the repair and left.

Perhaps he had noticed the truth from looking at the attitude of everyone there, but instead he respected Lux's intention and placed the blame on him.

「Hah.....! As expected from the bottom rung seventh imperial prince huh, Lux!」

「.....Keh. What a killjoy, crushing our plan like that.」

Abel sneered at his younger brother in a good mood, but Raged who didn't manage to push the blame on the Aingram house was clicking his tongue in annoyance.

He understood that Lux's action completely prevented any bad reputation toward Philuffy by making the head butler as the witness, at the same time he noticed that his own scheme was crushed.

「Well, doesn't matter..... You too, apologize to this girl for what you did.」

Even so, perhaps he thought that Lux would be hated by Philuffy because Raged then grinned daringly.

The two of them showered Lux with insults before they left that place.

Later there was only Lux and Philuffy remaining there.

「.....Sorry.」

Lux turned around and then said that while looking down.

He was scared.

It seemed the head butler put the blame on Lux with the understanding of what was actually going on, but Lux didn't think that the truth would be known by anybody else around them.

Lux was anxious that his bad reputation would spread among the people of the imperial court, but more than that there was also the risk that even his mother and Airi would also meet difficulty because of that.

And then, he would also get hated by none other than the girl in front of him.

(But, this was the only way.....)

If he tattled about the bad deed of the two, the two of them would resent him unjustly and they would surely bare their fangs not just at Lux, but also to all the people around him.

The result that would come from that ill will would be incomparable with the case this time.

「I'm really, sorry. But—uwah!?!」

Suddenly the silent Philuffy grabbed his hand and Lux raised his voice reflexively.

The palm of a girl that he touched for the first time was really soft—

「Slippery」

「Eh..... what's this, it's sticky—!?!」

And then, his hand became slippery with something like oil.

「You covered, for me.....didn't you?」

「Eh.....!?!」

Lux was taken by surprise by the question from the serious faced girl.

Lux also felt shocked that the silent Philuffy was starting a conversation from

her end, but more than that, (How, did she—?)

「The surface of that statue, is slippery. When I was pushed and touched it, I noticed. The hands of those two, was also slippery.」

「.....」

It was the oil of painting material. The completed sacred statue was most likely varnished with that.

The luster and stickiness of the oil wouldn't disappear right away even after washing it with water.

Surely Philuffy saw through the truth by confirming the hand of the two and Lux's hand.

「Thank you. You helped me.」

The expressionless girl showed a faint smile.

Lux who saw that for the first time felt a mysterious feeling filling his chest.

However—

「I'm, not.....」

When Lux recalled that his fellow imperial family member was trying to harm her, his mouth said those words.

「Sorry, I'm really—wah!?!」

Seeing the despondent Lux, Philuffy hit his head with one hand.

Rather than calling it hitting, the strength she was using was more like caressing. Her cheeks were puffing up a bit.

「Bad-, you know.」

「Eh.....?」

「Apologizing even though you aren't at fault, is no good.」

The girl said such thing dispassionately with a serious expression still fixed on her face.

「Doing that, is as no good as, not apologizing when you are at fault.」

「.....No but—」

「I'm, angry you know?」

When Lux tried to apologize again, Philuffy pushed back with a tone that didn't allow any objection.

Her expression didn't change, she didn't look like she was angry at all, even so her firm will could be felt.

When Lux was troubled of how to respond, Philuffy suddenly took out a small white bag from her breast pocket.

She took out a cookie as big as her pinkie from there and pushed it toward Lux's mouth.

「For you.」

「Eh.....!? Wait.」

「It's fine. My other hand, isn't dirty.」

Philuffy raised her other hand to show at the flustered Lux and she muttered so.

Lux was completely bewildered facing the sudden occurrence.

Because he had never received food from the hands of another person except his mother, not even once.

「The proof of, getting closer.」

However, the words and eyes of Philuffy who said that to him were very much straightforward. Lux couldn't refuse and put the cookie into his mouth.

The confection that had walnut fragments inside it was slightly sweet and fragrant.

「Is it delicious, Lu-chan?」

「Ye, yes. It's delicious, thank you.....」

He felt somewhat embarrassed. His cheeks reddened and he averted his gaze.

「I'm glad.」

Philuffy showed a small smile once more toward such Lux.

「.....Err, by the way, what do you mean by Lu-chan?」

「It's you. Because, you're Lux-kun.」

「Is, is that so!? But it sounds a bit embarrassing..... Getting called like that—」

「Phi.」

「Eh.....?」

Lux reflexively asked back toward the girl's sudden muttering.

「Call me, like that. Because, Okaa-san and Onee-chan, call me like that.」

「Eh..... Yes, I got it, Phil.....err」

「Phi, you know?」

When Lux got embarrassed and he faltered, Philuffy brought her face closer and demanded so.

This girl was silent and her emotion didn't really come out to the surface, but she had an aspect where she was far sharper and deeply prudent than she looked like.

And then, Lux also realized that she was more forceful and strong-willed than he thought.

「Then, take care of me. Phi-.....chan.」

That day, Lux made a friend of the same age for the first time.

Part 2

The second day of the training camp on Ries Island started.

「Lux. I've a request that I earnestly want to ask from you. Is it okay?」

The training was running to train basic stamina, and hand-to-hand combat that included sword fighting.

After those were finished, it was finally the time for Drag-Ride training. At that time Celis pulled Lux to stand in front of everyone.

「Err, what is it?」

Lux was nervous from being made to stand in front of everyone who were lined up in their pilot suit appearance, then, 「Last night, I was talking with headmaster Relie, and we are thinking to change the way to practice Drag-Rides slightly.」

「Changing, the way?」

「Yes. At first, I was planning to have everyone do self-assessment, then I'll have them train with the objective to better their strong points and overcome their weak points.」

「I think that's fine but—what are you going to change?」

When Lux tilted his head in puzzlement towards Celis's words, 「About those strong points and weak points, Lux, we're thinking to have you evaluate it.」

「Eeh.....!?」

Lux's eyes opened wide the moment he was told that.

「That's, what do you—?」

「It's simple.」

Relie who was watching from outside suddenly cut in and she approached

Lux's side.

「The selected members here know about your true skill. Then, having the strongest person, you, directly teaching them will be the fastest way to level them up, don't you think?」

An expert in using Drag-Rides giving guidance to others.

In this training camp where everyone knew about Lux's true strength, certainly, that might be a rational method.

「But, if that's the case then Celis-senpai can also do.....?」

「No, this is something that only you can do.」

Relie tapped Lux's shoulder.

「Rather than Celis-san who is always defeating her opponents with overwhelming strength, you who are fighting by intently seeing through the opponent's movement and have a good command of defense know about the weak points of the other students right? At the same time, you also accurately grasp their strong points too, so we want you to give advice based on all those factors, and present them a task as their target. Everyone also has no objection correct?」

'Yes!', the selected members immediately replied.

「.....I, I understand.」

Relie's proposal was certainly making sense.

When Lux nodded, Relie's lips grinned.

「Besides, even though we finally have the only boy in the academy here, it won't be interesting if we don't make you get caught up in various things.」

For some reason she muttered something suspicious.

「Also, if there are students who safely cleared the task they are given, I want Lux-kun to give them a reward. Specifically speaking, after this training camp is over and we go home, you can accept a personal request from them—」

「Eh.....!?」

Lux and the students raised their voices simultaneously in reaction to Relie's

following words.

「By the way, how about we pick three names from among the students who cleared their achievement quickly? By doing that, there will be a sense of competition among you all and the atmosphere will be heated up.」

Honestly speaking, Lux didn't mind giving others guidance, but he questioned this kind of method.

(Or rather, my will was completely ignored from the start wasn't it.....?) It also felt like it was always like this when it came to Relie.

「Eh? Is that really okay!? Headmaster!?」

「That sounds fu—my motivation is coming out!」

「I wonder if any kind of request is okay, like this or that or—」

And so on. The girls of Syvalles who he usually wasn't really close with had their eyes sparkle brightly and their mouths said those things.

The air became really lively. It was unthinkable that they were actually in the middle of training.

(Well, it can't be helped.....isn't it?)

Lux let out a sigh inside his heart with a mood that was slightly in resignation, it was then, 「Then, please do a mock battle with them one by one right away.」

「Ee—? Could it be, you are telling me to take a look at everyone by myself!?」

「Please do, okay? Because I have various work for the academy after this.」

Relie warded off Lux's objection and she left.

「Yosh! I'm first before everyone else! Lux, quickly prepare!」

Lisha pulled out the Sword Device of <Tiamat> as though to compete with the other students.

「Wait, you're planning to suddenly use a Divine Drag-Ride!?」

「What's with that? You don't like it? I think that it's meaningless to train if we don't give it our all though.」

「N, no, that's true but.....」

Lux was responding while moving to the center of the practice ground along with Lisha.

「The, then, it will be three minutes per person.....」

Lux couldn't get out of it anymore, so he resolved himself.

「I'll be next.」

「No I will—」

(I wonder, can my body hold.....)

Seeing the girls lining up and raising their hands striving to be the first, Lux's chest whirled with unease.

It went without mention, but the girls were strong.

However, he simulated in his mind that he would barely manage somehow, it was then, 「Pe, personal request is it..... Then I too by all means—I have to make a serious effort here.」

A tall girl with long blonde hair whispered with a small voice.

「No, please wait a second!? Don't tell me Celis-senpai is also joining in!?」

「.....Eh? Is, is it no good for me to participate!?」

Celis was full of motivation, but when Lux said that to her, her face looked shocked.

「That's not what I meant but.....based from what I saw when I fought senpai before, there is really nothing that especially needs to be fixed though—?」

「Is, is that so..... So that's it. I, who is the leader of Syvalles, need to have strength that doesn't need to be taught by someone else isn't it?」

Celis instantly made a proud smile and a dignified expression.

「Then, I'll do independent training. Or else, when you finished creating tasks for everyone later, I'll take on the role of assisting them then. That is surely the thing that I ought to do.」

Celis puffed out her voluptuous chest that possessed weighty presence before

she separated from the line up with brisk footsteps.

And then, she headed towards the practice ground space where there was no one, 「Haa..... It's independent training again. It's painful. When I try to teach my juniors, for some reason they will say 『That's beyond my station』 and refuse. When we went for the expedition to the capital too, various things happened and I beat the males of the army, so the instructor there avoided me from start to finish. Everyone looks like they are having fun, it's envious..... How nice.....」

Celis was enveloped in a depressing air while muttering under her breath without pause.

(Wha, what a really unbearable air.....!)

The other members watched that with complicated faces. Lux felt uneasy before he then hurriedly rushed towards Celis.

「Say, Celis-senpai. If you are fine with me, can I ask you to have a light bout with me?」

When Lux called out to her stiffly like that,

「Is it all right!?」

「Yes. If you are fine with the advice of someone like me.」

「.....」

For a moment, those beautiful jade pair of eyes sparkled brightly, however, a faint color of hesitation surfaced.

「N, no. Pardon me. Please forget it..... As I thought, your strength should be allotted between the members who are still in the middle of their growth. I judged that it's for the sake of Syvalles and the New Kingdom.」

Perhaps thinking of her position, Celis said that and restrained herself but, 「It's fine. Celis-senpai is really strong even now, but there is still room for you to grow.」



「Is, is that true?」

「Yes. That's why, if it's not a bother for you, can I ask you to have a little bout with me?」

「.....I, I understand. Then, I'll do as you say.」

Celis gave in with a faint blush on her cheeks, but there was a small smile floating on her lips.

「I'm happy that I can receive training from you. Lux really is a boy that can be relied on.」

Hearing those words that were whispered softly, Lux felt glad that he dared to call out to her but, 「Then, I'll use <Lindwurm> and go full strength after so long! That's fine isn't it, Lux?」

「Err, I'm planning to use my usual <Wyvern> so, that's, please don't be too hard on me.....」

He was extremely worried whether he would be able to hold on for three minutes.

And then one hour later.

「Haa, haa.....」

Lux carried out mock battles with everyone, gave simple guidance and advice, and presented a practice menu for everyone.

After that he moved to the shadow of a tree where he could avoid sunlight and fell down face up in order to take a rest.

「As, as I thought it was severe.....!」

At the practice ground in the distance, everyone was already carrying out each of their own training including cooperating with each other.

It seemed that everyone was motivated.

(No but, I don't think that they are motivated just for the sake of making a request to me though. There is no way.) The international tournament this time would be held in the royal capital of the New Kingdom Atismata, Lordgalia. The

feudal lords of the New Kingdom were also assembled in great numbers there.

If one's strength was acknowledged by them, it might be possible to get employment as a knight.

In a sense, it was a stage that could also be called as the trade fair of Drag-Knights.

It wasn't just for acquiring the investigation rights for Ruins, but it also included such significance.

(It will be great if we can win safely without incident but.....) According to the information he heard from Airi, the Heiburg Republic was also participating.

Regarding the incident where the Academy was assaulted the other day, the New Kingdom government questioned the Republic, but because the group that attacked was a bunch of fellows that weren't publically acknowledged, there was no satisfying response from the Republic.

The Heiburg Republic once had their territory threatened by the Old Empire Arkadia, they had also received damage from a Ragnarok Divine Beast of Demise in the past. Because of those, they expanded their military strength in opposition.

But, the enlargement of the organization and military strength also brought about distortion in their political field at the same time.

Skirmishes with the neighboring countries, and the acquisition of Ruin investigation rights where treasures and technology were sleeping.

Their military expansion advanced even further as countermeasures against the AbyssPhantom Divine Beast that appeared from the ruins, completely rewriting the political power map.

The Republican system was turning into a mere shell, and there was a rumor that the actual holder of highest authority was in fact the army commander.

There was no doubt that they were a troublesome opponent.

There, even that mysterious strategist called Hayes also joined in.

「Fuu.....」

Lux who finally stopped sweating opened his eyes along with a sigh.

When he got up in order to return to the practice ground, he could see a human silhouette coming his way with staggering footsteps.

「Eh? Phi.....chan?」

The childhood friend Lux was familiar with was holding her forehead with one hand while heading his way with swaying footsteps.

「I'm a bit, tired.....」

And then her posture crumbled before she could reach the tree shadow Lux was at.

「Dangerous-!」

Lux hurriedly caught her body that almost fell down, and then, (What's, this.....? Her temperature is really hot.....)

It wasn't just fatigue.

It might be that she was dehydrated because of the heat, in any case it wasn't normal.

「Phi-chan, are you okay!? Get a hold of yourself!」

「Nn.....」

Lux was questioning her, but Philuffy was only raising her voice weakly and she didn't even twitch.

Tillfur was coming to take a break as well. Lux told her that he was going to bring Philuffy back to the lodging before he began to walk while holding Philuffy's body.

Part 3

「Airi! Where is, the village's physician—?」

「-.....!? I know the place, so I'll go to call him. Nii-san, please lay down Philuffy-san on the bed and make her comfortable.」

After returning to the boardinghouse, for the time being Lux led Philuffy toward the bedroom.

He laid down his childhood friend who was breathing roughly with her eyes closed there, after that, 「Phi-chan, are you okay? Get a hold of yourself.」

「It feels, hard to breathe.My chest.」

Philuffy muttered deliriously when Lux called out to her.

「I get it! I'll loosen the suit a little, so don't worry—」

But, when Lux was actually going to do it, he was troubled.

「Eh..... This suit, how does it work again?」

It was obvious, but Lux only knew about the suit for male use.

It wouldn't be too late even if he waits for someone to come to loosen up Philuffy's suit but—

「Nn, uu.....」

Seeing Philuffy groaning painfully, Lux's feeling became impatient.

「Yosh.....」

Lux resolved himself and he tampered with the fastener to loosen the fastening around the chest area. Right at that moment, 「Eh.....!?」

The fastener was suddenly unfastened, and the fabric of special material smoothly opened to the left and right.

And then, her white breasts that were tightly repressed until now spilled out

before Lux's eyes.

「-.....!？」

Big.



He already understood it even just from looking from above her uniform or suit, but now that he was looking at it directly like this, that sense of voluptuousness became even further engraved into his realization.

Even when Philuffy kept lying down face up, the shape of the breasts almost didn't lose shape, they were quietly swaying along with her breathing.

「.....?」

Lux forgot to even breath, he was rooted still in place. And then suddenly Philuffy opened her eyes.

「.....What're you doing, Lu-chan?」

Getting questioned like that with his face still blushing, Lux was at loss for words.

「Tha, that's, this is you see—!? I, it's not like I did this with wicked feeling.....」

「.....」

When Lux tried to justify himself in panic, he felt a strong killing intent behind him that made him turn around.

「What are you doing, Nii-san?」

Airi, whose eyes were dark despite the smile on her face, was standing there.

「E, err, that—. I don't understand how to take off the suit!」

「It doesn't matter, please go out quickly from this room-!」

「I, I'm sorry-!」

Yelled angrily by Airi, Lux rushed out from the sleeping room and escaped.

Surely Philuffy herself wouldn't be angry about the circumstance, but Lux got the feeling that the present Airi wouldn't listen to him.

Part 4

Ten minutes later.

After Lux changed into his uniform and waited outside, Relie's voice called out to him out of nowhere.

Fortunately after that Philuffy's condition immediately recovered and it seemed she was resting right now.

According to the island's physician, Philuffy might be affected by light anemia and heatstroke.

「Thank you for taking care of her. But I wonder, will it be better to teach you the way to take off a girl's pilot suit for the future?」

After the health checkup was finished, Relie who came back to the boardinghouse said that to him jokingly.

Philuffy who had been changed into a thin sleepwear was lying down on the bed quietly.

「I beg you, please let me off already.....」

When Lux said that with his head hanging down crestfallenly, Relie made a smile that was filled with implication.

「My? You'll be taken advantage of if you apologize too much you know? Then, perhaps I should have Lux-kun formally take responsibility.」

「Excuse me, Relie-san, did you call me to bully me.....?」

When Lux raised his face with a bitter expression, Relie chuckled a bit.

「That also sounds fun, but what I want to say is about a bit of work. Regarding Philuffy's matter—」

「Eh.....?」

Lux was puzzled hearing those unexpected words, and then, 「About what happened to her just now, recently the change in Philuffy's physical condition is drastic. That's why—during this training camp, can I have you take the role as my little sister's attendant?」

「Attendant.....is it?」

「Just as Lux-kun also knows, Philuffy doesn't really let her emotions come out right? But, if it's you my little sister won't force herself, or maybe you will understand her even if it's just from slight subtlety. —What do you think? Can I rely on you?」

Certainly, it was just like Relie said.

For a moment, Lux wondered if a girl would be more suitable in various meanings to look after Philuffy, but if it was something like Relie said then Lux was the one suited for it.

However, gauging Philuffy's emotion wasn't something easy even for Lux though.....

「—I understand. If you are okay with me, then I'll accept.」

He immediately resolved himself and accepted the request.

If there was something he could do for Philuffy's sake, then he had no reason to refuse.

「Thank you, Lux-kun.」

Seeing the relieved Relie, Lux felt glad from the bottom of his heart that he received her request.

「By the way the spare underwear for her change of clothes is inside this closet.」

「Wait, why are you telling me such thing-!?」

Lux reflexively retorted when he saw the place Relie pointed at.

「I think that you will need it while looking after Philuffy.」

「Now see here.....」

When Lux was exasperated toward Relie who was showing him a wide smile,

Philuffy raised her face and said.

「When sleeping, I'm fine, even if I don't wear clothes you know?」

「Thank you. Then there won't be any problem then.....not that!! That's really bad you know!? How did it turn out like that!?」

Lux imagined for a moment Philuffy laying down on the bed naked before he shook his head flusteredly.

In the end, it was decided that he would call the other students when Philuffy needed to change clothes and he saw off Relie leaving.

「Fuu..... In any case, I'll look after you, Phi-chan. Tell me right away if your condition worsens.」

「Yes. Thank you, Lu-chan.」

The two casually exchanged those words inside the room where they were left alone.

「Then, is there something you want me to do right now?」

When he said that for the time being to fill the silence, 「Heave-ho」

Philuffy got up slowly from the bed and began to take off her sleepwear that was a chic black blouse.

「Wai-!? What are you doing so suddenly!?」

「Changing clothes.Anything wrong?」

Lux was flustered instead when Philuffy replied so seriously.

「That's not what I mean, that—I, I'll call someone here so-.....!?」

「.....? My body, is already fine you know?」

「Ah, I, I see.....! Then, I'll be going-!」

There was no way he could stare at her changing there. Lux went out of the room.

As expected, looking after Philuffy who was doing this at her own pace was difficult. Lux realized that once more.

Part 5

On the night of the second day of the training camp when the afternoon practice was over, the atmosphere was calm compared to the boisterousness of the first day.

At the free time after dinner, there were also those who already headed to their rooms because of fatigue, but Lux did the chores of the boardinghouse by his own initiative.

「Doing work even though no one is asking you, Nii-san is already seriously ill.....」

Lux was cleaning up the dishes and drew water that would be used for the next day while the exasperated Airi threw a retort at him.

After that, he went to look at the condition of Philuffy who was sleeping in her bedroom in order to rest.

So that he wouldn't get caught in Relie's trap, he carefully knocked before entering the room.

「Is your body all right, Phi-chan?」

「Yes. I'm fine.」

Philuffy nodded and answered concisely before her eyes dropped toward the book in her hand.

When Lux handed her a tea mixed with honey that he made in the kitchen, Philuffy said「Thank you」 and nodded with a small smile.

「Come to think of it, what are you reading there?」

Lux who was relieved at Philuffy's good condition turned his gaze to her hand.

「Book of economy. Like the law of trade, various things」

「Eh.....?」

Lux spontaneously leaked out a surprised voice hearing that slightly unexpected answer.

Hearing what Philuffy said, thinking back, certainly the Aingram family was a conglomerate that had continued since the era of the Old Empire. They were controlling several mercantile houses.

The way of making use of abundant capital, the procurement of merchandise, buying and selling.

And then, the understanding of the law that was related to trade.

Philuffy was also the second daughter of the Aingram family, someday she should be placed into an important position there.

In that case, there were a lot of things she had to learn while she was a student.

Thinking carefully, that was something that should be obvious for someone of her standing but—

(What's this? I was arbitrarily thinking that there is no way Philuffy is like that based from her image.....) That was the impression he arbitrarily harbored about his childhood friend Philuffy, but people change.

Lux was feeling a bit complicated while he tried to change his feeling, it was then, 「.....I think? What's this book?」

「You don't know!? Why are you asking me!?」

Philuffy tilted her head in puzzlement midway. Lux acted the straight man with all his heart in response.

「Lu-chan. It's no good if you're noisy at night, you know?」

「Ah..... So, sorry. I was loud—. Tha, that's not it. That book, did you read it yesterday?」

「Yes. When I'm reading this book, I can sleep well.」

「The way you use it is wrong you know-!?」

Should he say that he was disappointed, or perhaps shocked, anyway as expected Philuffy was Philuffy.

「But, very soon I have to decide, about this kind of thing too.」

Philuffy was muttering so quietly with her usual mellow voice.

「You mean, about our career after graduating?」

「Yes. I too at least, have to think about it.」

「I see.....」

Seeing Philuffy say that while drinking the tea in one gulp, Lux thought for a bit.

In the course of five years of life doing odd jobs and traveling to search for Fugil, who destroyed the Old Empire, he was admitted into this academy.

After that he became friends with several girls and overcame large incidents so far.

Because he had been fighting through battles where it wouldn't be strange even if he died until now, putting aside about his own mission and objective, Lux had never thought about something like the future at all.

「Though Onee-chan, she told me『I want you to become my bodyguard and secretary』.」

「Is, is that so.....」

No matter what, he couldn't imagine Philuffy assisting Relie in matters of business, so he felt like that Philuffy would be perfectly suited only to become a bodyguard.

Unexpectedly Philuffy was also strong in unarmed hand-to-hand fighting, and she was even able to use a Divine Drag-Ride, because of that she must be qualified if she took the license as an official military officer.

「Lu-chan, do you have, something you want to do?」

「Err, I'm—」

He couldn't reply right away.

Something he wanted to do.

‘In the past, what I wanted to do was—.’

『I'll absolutely create it! A country where even girls like Phi-chan can feel safe, I will create it! I swear that I'll absolutely change this empire! That's why—』

At the time he was a young child, when he parted with his important childhood friend, they exchanged a promise.

In the end he couldn't fulfill it by his own hands, and he chose the path of overthrowing the country.

Even that path found him mowed down midway and Lux's determination became suspended in limbo.

『I don't really have anything like that right now. If I can become the strength for everyone in the academy, then I'm satisfied with just that.』

『I see.』

Philuffy closed the book with a snap before she talked earnestly.

For a moment Lux was startled, wondering whether she would broach about the topic of the promise he said to her in the past.

『In that case, I'm relieved I think?』

『Eh.....?』

Philuffy whose expression was absentminded as usual smiled softly at him.

What did she mean by that?

Lux didn't understand at all. And when he was waiting for the continuation of her words—

- GOGOGOGOGOGOooOONn.....!*

『-.....!?』

Along with a terrific rumble in the ground, the earth along with the boarding house shook and he reflexively held his breath.

There was a mechanical sound of something moving like a Drag-Ride, in addition to the sound of huge water splashes.

(Even though earthquakes rarely occur in the New Kingdom, don't tell me—!)
「Phi-chan, stay there and don't move! I'm going to see the situation!」

Lux reflexively put his hand on the Sword Device on his hip and yelled so.

He rushed out from the bedroom into the living room. Relie was already there along with several students.

「My my, it's faster than expected. I thought that it would take a bit more time though—」

While everyone was surprised and on their guard, it was only Relie who was smiling with a slight drunken intoxication.

「Headmaster. What in the world this—?」

Celis was the first to ask. Relie got up on her feet and she started walking towards the door.

「Everyone, come with me. I will teach you the true objective of this training camp now.」

When they went outside, the moon was floating in the sky.

The sea that was vibrantly blue in the afternoon now looked completely different. The sea was pitch black.

In the shadows of the raging waves that looked like the devil's beckoning hand, the figure of a ship that was even more gigantic than the island could be seen.

Everyone climbed the only lighthouse in the island and they witnessed it.

A strangely shaped ship that was larger than any military ship Lux had ever seen before.

「This is, could it be.....」

The moment Lisha whispered so, Relie nodded.

「Yes, one of the Ruins in the New Kingdom's territory. What we call the third Ruin, the Ark.」

「——」

Even among the Syvalles, few had the experience of seeing the Ark.

Even Lux who had the experience of guarding the surrounding of a Ruin had only seen this Ark once from afar at a different place from this island.

It was a special Ruin that usually bobbed up and down in the ocean of the New Kingdom. It would change locations in a fixed period.

Due to its special characteristic of making its appearance mostly above the sea, he heard that the investigation of this Ruin was mostly not progressing.

「Headmaster. You said the true objective, don't tell me—you mean this?」

「It helps that you guessed quickly.」

Relie returned a smile at Celis's question.

「The investigation of the New Kingdom's third Ruin, this Ark, that's our mission this time. The gate keeper of the depths—the Ragnarok, Poseidon, that was said to be released from here by the Old Empire. Now that it had died in the battle at the practice ground before this, there is the possibility that the door towards the deepest level is opened. It's the place where everyone in this generation hasn't reached yet you see.」

「.....」

The students subconsciously held their breaths hearing the indifferent explanation of Relie.

The sound of raging waves that resulted from the appearance of the Ark was buried by that silence.

「The objective of our coming to this island other than having a training camp, is to accomplish a secret mission from the New Kingdom. This Ark will be mooring in the vicinity of this Ries Island for approximately a week. We will begin infiltrating to investigate starting from tomorrow afternoon. Do you understand, everyone?」

After the students nodded, everyone returned to the boardinghouse while they were still bewildered.

Because the night had grown late, they went to sleep right away.

Because there were three bedrooms for two people and two bedrooms for four people, it was just right for the number of members this time.

Through a natural conclusion or common sense decision, the siblings Lux and Airi shared a room, so everything was settled.

Even Lux somehow understood that everyone was being taciturn.

(The deepest floor of a Ruin that no one has reached before..... is it?) The structures from ancient times that was still mostly inexplicable—the Ruins.

The weight of witnessing a yet unknown known legacy before anyone else in the world made everyone timid.

It was a secret investigation, that was why no one was told until they arrived on this island.

If the country massed the troops openly, it would attract attention from every other country, because of that this training camp was used as pretense to gather the elites for investigation.

It wasn't like Lux didn't understand about that kind of situation.

(But what's this? This strange out of place feeling.....)

「Is Nii-san also concerned?」

Airi asked inside the room that already had its lighting turned off.

「Concerned.....it's not to that degree though.」

「Then, I won't say anything yet about that. I too am still unable to form my words.」

After ending it there, there was only the sound of calm breathing filling inside the room.

「.....」

Lux's body was quite tired from the long journey and two days of training, but he wasn't really able to sleep.

(How is that place right now I wonder.....?)

The day of the coup d'etat five years ago.

His childhood friend Philuffy was taken away for the sake of medication experiments. Hearing that, Lux located this place and came to save her.

And then, he searched for her in the basement of a certain monastery— for some reason he couldn't recall the memory after that no matter what.

(However—Philuffy should have been safe that time.)

A while after that, a letter that notified him of Philuffy's safety reached him, besides—

Right now the girl was at Lux's side in healthy shape after all.

The silent sound of waves was gradually filling his thoughts.

And then, Lux finally fell asleep.

Part 6

On the morning of the next day, it was the time for independent training immediately following the basic training.

Together with Lisha, Lux went towards the atelier of Drag-Rides on Ries Island.

A spacious arrangement of rooms made from stone, the smell of oil and metal that stabbed the nose.

At the large pedestal in the center, a great number of assembled Drag-Rides and weapons were scattered.

The fundamental construction was similar to the atelier inside the academy, but the atelier here was larger in scale.

Naturally, the inside of the atelier was filled with important highly classified information, so it seemed that no one could enter if it wasn't someone with authority at the level of Lisha.

First Lux was instructed to summon the *<Wyvern>* he was using, so he pulled out his Sword Device and called out his Drag-Ride—

「Then, activate the System mode of the *<Wyvern>* for me.」

「System, is it? Err—」

Lux did as he was told even while tilting his head in puzzlement.

He lightly closed his eyes and carried out the mind control operation towards the Drag-Ride before his eyes.

When Lux sent the image thought of the Drag-Ride and his nerve connected with each other, bluish white light was formed from the head part of the folded *<Wyvern>*. The light then emerged as a window frame, graphics, and countless character strings.

「Err, next be aware of the graphic at the upper left and look at it. You can proceed using that.」

Lux couldn't read ancient letters, so he operated following Lisha's instruction.

By using the controllerjoystick that was the Sword Device, the Drag-Ride could be made to enter a state that was called the system mode. There, things like the tuning of the Drag-Ride, the authentication registration, and so on could be performed.

Things like the tuning of Drag-Ride parts, adjusting the output of the equipped weapons and so on were also indispensable functions, but in general a lot of Drag-Knights only knew about the system of authentication registration that was done at the very beginning.

Similarly, Lux was also one of those many who only knew of that very basic function, but—

「Yosh, remember the control procedure you have just done so that you can do it yourself. <Bahamut> should also have basically the same procedure like this.」

Countless graphics and bluish white letters were floating above the head of the Drag-Ride.

When all those advanced until a state where everything was released, Lisha told Lux to take a breather.

「So with this the new function can be used?」

「Yeah, with this the Drag-Ride's function and weapon's strength will increase exceptionally. For example, the great sword your <Bahamut> has, if it's that <Chaos BrandStigma Sword>, not to mention its destructive power, just by defending, it can accomplish the same role like the Scale BladeBarrier Fang Sword I created exclusively for the <Wyvern>.」

「Is that, true?」

「However, if you mistaken the way to use it, then you will die though.」

「Eh.....!?」

Lux's face spontaneously grimaced. Lisha let out a small sigh to that.

「Remember that this is just my personal experience. This is a method to connect with the system to release the full ability of the Drag-Ride that is usually restricted. All Drag-Rides, in order to avoid excessive burden to the user's body, stamina, and mental fatigue—the Drag-Ride's performance is usually not fully accessible. A Drag-Ride in a state where this limiter is fully released is called the <Awakened State>, the mention of this was written in the ancient text from a Ruin. But, no matter which country, including the New Kingdom, none have reached the stage where they can make a practical use of it.」

The theory was understandable.

Even in horse-riding, there were examples of cases where someone died from fatigue due to the distance and time traveled.

Surely it would be impossible to use the Drag-Ride stably when the system to reduce burden towards the Drag-Knight was removed.

「You can close the system mode now. The input of the code to release all the ability limiter from there can be performed using mind control operation through the Sword Device but, don't you dare test it yet okay?」

Just as Lisha said, when he cut off the mind control operation that he was doing through the Sword Device, the floating countless letters and graphics vanished, and the Drag-Ride was also turned inactive.

「The limiter release for a Divine Drag-Ride is a bit more particular, it's something delicate you see. Regarding your <Bahamut> too, I'm investigating its limiter release code but—it's dangerous until we fully understand the details.」

Lisha continued talking with a serious tone.

「I tried it with <Tiamat> around a year ago, but when I released around half of the limiter, I almost died. That's why until now the use of it is sealed but—」

「Are you, planning to use it from now on?」

「I'm thinking of searching for a good way to release the limiter, so that it can be used somehow. It will be best if we never have to use it but, nothing will be gained if we are scared to take a step forward.」

「.....」

The code to surpass the limits of a Drag-Ride and evolve it into the awakened state.

Lux was puzzled.

Even though this should be the first time he heard about it, he felt nostalgic somewhere inside himself.

「By any chance, is the selfishness that Lisha-sama mentioned before, is it about this?」

Lux recalled what she said to him the day before yesterday and when he asked her, 「N, no, that's about another matter. It's something more personal for me should I say.....」

Lisha entangled her fingers with each other while fidgeting. She looked hesitant.

After she was acting like that for a while, she opened her mouth with resolve.

「Tha, that—wo, won't you become my knight!?」

「Knight—?」

「A, actually..... mother had been saying it to me since long ago. When I graduate from the academy I'll have to do a lot of public business, so I should have an exclusive attendant as my guard. Until now, I was opposed to having a male knight assigned to me, so I've been turning it down all this time, but—」

「Could it be Lisha-sama means me?」

「I, if it's you, you're strong, you know about my secret, and most of all, if you will stay by my side—」

Lisha was about to say something, but then her face reddened and she shut her mouth.

Becoming the knight of Lisha who was the princess of the New Kingdom.

That invitation that he had never even anticipated caused Lux's mind to become blank for a moment.

「By any chance, do you, hate it?」

「Tha, that's not true! It's an honor, but—」

He was an imperial family member of the Old Empire.

A criminal that was the last surviving member.

Wouldn't it be a problem if someone like him was given the position as the knight of the princess?

Besides, the queen, the feudal lords under her command, and many of the people might refuse to acknowledge it.

「I know what you want to say. I also know how difficult it will be to make it a reality..... However, I want you to think about it. It's fine, if you just think about it.....」

Lisha finished talking with a tone that vaguely sounded vexed and she averted her face away.

「Yo, you understand now!? You can give me your answer after we return to the academy so, bye!」

Telling him that, Lisha went out of the atelier.

Lux was watching the girl vanish behind the door, and then he stayed unmoving for a while in that place.

「A knight of the New Kingdom, of Lisha-sama, is it.....」

He didn't feel bad towards her proposal.

Rather, he felt happy towards the trust and special feelings she directed towards him. But—

「Do I, have any.....qualifications for that?」

Lux whispered to himself and looked up to the sooty ceiling.

Before long he noticed that he wouldn't find the answer quickly. He locked the atelier's door and he exited the room too.

Part 7

In the afternoon, after the individual free practice was over and everyone had lunch at the boardinghouse.

When the members were taking a rest after the meal in their own way, it suddenly came.

「.....Eh?」

The small silhouette of a ship could be seen from the second floor window of the boardinghouse.

At a glance, the ship wasn't a fishing ship or a merchant ship. The crest of the New Kingdom was drawn on the sail.

The army shouldn't be practicing here while Lux and the others were at the training camp, but—

「Anyway, I have to tell everyone about this.」

When Lux was about to head towards the living room, the sound of a bell could be heard from the lighthouse.

The signal of the bell ringing three times seemed to be the notification of a sudden visitor.

After a while, the large army ship docked at the island's wharf.

Relie and the selection members gathered. When they arrived at the pier, the visitors had already disembarked the ship.

The old man that was the manager of the port welcomed a middle-aged man wearing a noble dress suit and men who seemed to be his subordinates.

「Please pardon my rudeness of coming to visit without any prior notice. My name is Dobar Fest. Please to make your acquaintance from here on.」

He was a man with a round and wide body, his head was bald with a plentiful

white beard growing on his face.

From a glance, he looked like a good-natured elderly man, but Lux felt an impression that the man was vaguely unsettled.

It was a presence unique to an influential person who placed himself in the political arena.

「What a surprise, welcome, you've traveled for quite the distance. However, what could bring your honor to a far away island like this.....?」

The elderly man lowered his head and tilted his head, then this man called Dobar showed a smile.

「Who is this person?」

Krulcifer who was observing the situation from a distance whispered with a low voice.

Lux, too, wasn't that knowledgeable regarding the nobles of the New Kingdom, so he didn't know about this person, but,

「Marquis Dobar. He can be considered as a distant relative of her majesty the queen of the New Kingdom Atismata. He was a former military officer of the Old Empire. After he passed a certain age, he served as a feudal lord of a remote region, but right after the establishment of the New Kingdom, it seems he recommended himself as a candidate for the new consul and returned to the capital along with his knight order. If I remember correctly, right now his official position is as an adviser for the army or something.」

Airi smoothly explained with a flowing tone.

「How detailed, Airi Arkadia. Though I too only know as much as his name.」

Celis who was at the head of the selection members said so in admiration, then,

「That's because the fate of Nii-san and I hangs upon the current royal family.」

Airi responded like that very seriously.

While Lux was chasing after the 『external』 threat that was Fugil, Airi was making use of her intellect and position to constantly pay attention to the

『internal』—to the domestic affairs of the New Kingdom.

What was called as authority was more uncertain than what could be currently seen, it was something precarious.

They didn't know when the enemy, the 『survivors of the Old Empire』, would appear and act hostilely towards them.

It could be imagined from Airi's words how much meticulous attention she paid towards that aspect.

『He should be considered my relative, but I don't even remember his name regarding that..... However, why has that kind of guy come to this island right now?』

When Lisha whispered so in irritation, Relie also exchanged a casual greeting with Dobar, and then both of them went together towards where Lux and the others were at.

『Oo. It has been a long time, your highness. You've grown beautiful. By any chance, do you remember me?』

Dobar first bowed towards Lisha who was a distant relative, and next he turned towards Lux and the others.

『Also, all of you are the chosen members with skill that cannot be made light of even in Cross Field—the Syvalles isn't it? Forgive me for the ruckus I caused this time. Even in the capital I've heard about the deeds of arms that all of you have displayed, how all of you made great contributions as Drag-Knights even while still being officer cadets. This might be an unrelated matter for all of you but, I'm—』

『We know about your identity. There is no need for self-introduction, Marquis Dobar. Rather than that, just what is your business coming here? We're going to be busy from here on.』

『How rude of me my princess. But, we have not the slightest intention of being a nuisance to the mission of Syvalles. Rather it's the opposite—we came here to be of assistance even as meager as our capabilities are.』

When Lisha spoke looking slightly vexed, Dobar showed her a flattering smile.

「Actually, the other day I happened to overhear a bit of information. I understand that in this period of time, a Ruin, the Ark, would appear adjacent to this island—. I came here to prepare just in case but, good gracious I'm shocked that it's actually true.」

「.....!？」

Tension ran through all the members who heard that.

The Ruin investigation this time should be a top secret mission from the royal family.

Such thinking also flashed inside Lux's head for a moment but—

「The investigation of a Ruin is accompanied with danger. Especially when it comes to this time's investigation, where there is a possibility to reach the deepest part that no one has ever reached, then it will be even more true. By all means, I wish to be allowed for my elite force to cooperate in this investigation.」

Dobar showed a courteous attitude, but his eyes were alighted with a wicked light, there wasn't any indication at all that he was talking about 『genuine cooperation』.

He was a fellow who lined up plausible reasons to snuggle close to authority and treasure.

If one tried to reach the deepest part of a Ruin, then there was a high possibility that the amount and quality of the treasure would be different from everything of before.

Surely this man had the aim to purely try to embezzle that treasure, but there was also the possibility that he was selling favor here in the name of cooperating with the Ruin investigation, aiming to climb up in status in the New Kingdom.

Although, it was hard to reprimand this arriving noble from their standpoint as fellow people of the New Kingdom.

Therefore, everyone, not just Lisha, was unable to say anything, it was then, 「I understand what you are saying.」

Relie made a gentle smile and responded.

「Are you perhaps aware of the pact of Ruin investigation? Regarding a part of the excavated information and treasure, and also things like the appearing Abyss and other phenomenon, it's necessary to report it to the royal family and other foreign countries.」

「Of course I'm aware. I'm also bringing the investigation rule book and the protocol book. I wish to be allowed for my force to be entrusted with being the advance vanguard and the logistical support by all means.」

There was a shadow behind Marquis Dobar's statement, but they also couldn't refuse him out of hand.

Relie who must have understood all of that displayed an unfazed smile.

「My thanks for your cooperation. But, this mission is dangerous and yet it's necessary to be urgent, so even if by any chance the force your honor employed meets a predicament, it's possible that we won't be able to assist them. Therefore, I'm thinking if this time we can ask you to have discretion and—」

「I see, haha.」

Dobar grinned and laughed in response to Relie's roundabout rejection.

「You don't need to worry you know, headmaster-dono. The actions of my force and the responsibility for that will be wholly taken by me who is commanding them. You don't need to feel reserved about our cooperation. However, yes—you can just think that the number of helping hands to carry back information and treasure has increased a little.」

He was talking with a calm tone, but his eyes clearly emitted clear opposition.

「Then, let the both of us give our all for the prosperity of the New Kingdom, Dobar-dono.」

「I'll pray for your success, headmaster-dono.」

On the surface Relie was accepting Dobar's cooperation, but there were several tacit understandings that was exchanged implicitly.

There was no obligation to help each other, the investigation and excavation would be carried out by their own respective judgment.

That agreement was established right now in this place, it was at that moment—

- GOuuuUUUN-!*

A strange mechanical sound resounded throughout the island along with a rumble in the ground that was similar to yesterday.

Sea sprays that exceeded the rock cliff was raised and the black Ark ran aground on the shore.

「Oo.....! Just as the information said, it looks like it's approaching even nearer. Then—excuse me.」

Dobar bowed exaggeratedly and left with a quick pace.

Seeing him off, Relie then turned towards the members of Syvalles.

「Sorry you all, we were talking too long.」

「We don't mind. But headmaster, what are we going to do?」

Celis glanced at the bewildered members and asked Relie.

But, Relie didn't look worked up. She began to walk with her shoes making steady footstep sounds.

「It's just as all of you saw just now. We the Syvalles will follow our original plan and begin the top secret mission after this. We will do it ahead of anyone else—get it?」

「As I thought, so it's something like that.」

Celis sighed in understanding.

「Even though we talked about cooperating in the investigation, both our sides won't interfere with each other. Till the end both sides will carry out their own investigation by their own judgment carrying their own responsibility. In other words—」

「That's really easy to understand. In short, it's first come first served right?」

Lisha concluded like that along with a fearless smile.

「Conquering the Ruin faster than that suspicious group and reach the unknown territory, whether we can do that or not—. Originally there should be no reason for fellow citizens of the New Kingdom to compete with each other but, we've got to do it.」

Saying that, Lisha directed her confident crimson eyes toward the Ark. Her gaze looked as though she was pointing a sword.

「I guess. At the very least, they didn't show any signs of cooperating with us. I don't know to what extent those people have hidden intentions in this, but that's the only thing we can be sure on.」

Krulcifer also brushed up her hair with a cool face and agreed with Lisha. Dobar spoke about 『not cooperating』, but it wasn't because he felt apprehension of the operation getting delayed, but it must be because he wanted to help himself to the treasure.

In that case, they couldn't lose in this competition.

「Everyone, can you finish preparations for the Ruin investigation in fifteen minutes?」

Celis tensed her expression and she addressed the members.

「We planned for the investigation today to take an hour and a half, but we will alter the time to two hours. We will increase the ration we carry in case of an unexpected situation, conversely please decrease the mining tools you carry. We will prioritize our advancing speed and restrain ourselves from recovering treasure, and calculate our route based on that. Is that fine, headmaster?」

「That's perfect, Celis-san.」

Relie smiled and said that to Celis who gave out instructions swiftly.

「Everyone, you are not permitted to be flustered because of competing against their force. The Ruin is a dangerous place, that's why we should act reliably, please conduct yourself correctly. Understand?」

「.....Yes-!」

Everyone nodded toward Celis's instruction. And then they broke up for the

moment.

—And then, fifteen minutes later.

The members of Syvalles had changed into their Drag-Knight suits and finished their preparations. They assembled at the shore area under the lighthouse.

Part 8

「So this is—the Ark.」

There was only one way to board the Ruin—the Ark according to the investigation reports of the New Kingdom.

By standing at the middle of the circle of ancient letters drawn at the center of the deck, people would be pulled in along with light after staying there for a fixed time.

In short, it was the same transfer system as the Garden.

If there was one thing that was different, it was only that there was just one spot that was the exit and entrance.

The Ark came to a stop in the form of running aground the rocky area nearby the lighthouse—at the eastern part of Ries Island, so they embarked towards the deck directly by using the leaping power of the Drag-Rides.

However, the structure's size was tremendous. Because it was bigger by several dozen times compared to a normal large ship, the Ruin could only be looked down at after climbing up the island's lighthouse.

「Then let's go. We will send the signal using dragon voice after confirming that it's safe.」

First three people including Celis observed the Ruin from the sky above, then they sent the signal that it was safe to board.

And then, the following members flew or jumped and they boarded above the deck one after another.

「Nii-san. It's time, please.」

Airi who was waiting nearby looked up to Lux and said that to him.

Relie and Airi who weren't Drag-Knights would come along and enter the Ruin

because there were a lot of Drag-Knights to be their guards and in order to investigate the inside of the Ruin in detail.

Of course because there would be danger, Lux told them not to come, but Airi said 「I'm not a child」 and volunteered herself.

「Ah, yes. But, I've never really fly while carrying someone so..... That's, be careful.」

「Nii-san's feelings towards me will be in question depending on how you do.」

Airi showed a mischievous smile and said bluntly.

Lux smiled wryly at Airi's words and he flew with her in his arms.

That act in itself was extremely skillful but—

「That's—!？」

When the circle pattern and the spacious deck that was several dozen times that of a normal ship came into view, even more different things entered their sight.

What they caught sight of was Marquis Dobar and the private force he owned.

「With this, both sides have their forces assembled. It looks like by chance both of us happen to be here at the same timing, so I believe we should enter at the same time..... Is that fine with you, your honor?」

「But of course. If we can enter a Ruin along with Cross Field's Syvalles, then there will be nothing more reassuring than that.」

Marquis Dobar nodded pleasantly towards the invitation of Headmaster Relie who was standing in the middle of the circle pattern.

Even though Dobar and the others should be the ones that departed later, and yet they were already here. It looked like they were going to charge in without any sufficient preparations but, 「Looks like the force of marquis-sama arrived here only just now. Looks like those people are also quite crafty in their doings.」

Krulcifer, who was observing the course of events from a distance, whispered

in a low voice.

「You mean those people also came here with their preparations completely in order?」

「It's not that kind of proper reason.」

Krulcifer shook her head towards Lux's question.

「Regarding the Ark, there is only one entrance and exit based on what is known. —That means that in case there is a swarm of Abyss gathering inside at the transfer destination, it will suddenly become an all-out battle. The enemy's number, type, and also the terrain condition won't be able to be predicted. If we fall into such a situation, then even if we don't get annihilated, there will be a great chance that it will become a hindrance to our later deployment.」

「Then, that means they were waiting here for us to arrive?」

「Yes. Let alone being the advance vanguard, their tactic is to make us become the advance vanguard for them instead. That we ran into them here must be because of bad luck. Of course, the headmaster also noticed this.」

Krulcifer's matter-of-fact consideration caused Lux to leak out a sigh.

Relie said that their side was comprehensively superior than Dobar's force, but if they let their guard down the other side might reach the deepest part ahead of them.

Lux judged it to be so and he tensed himself.

「But, for them to try to make us be the advance vanguard, means that that bunch isn't that strong right? Then there is no problem. I'll let loose for the first time in a while.」

Lisha grinned and she moved her mixed Drag-Ride that was the combination of two types of Drag-Rides, the <Chimeric Wyvern> to show off.

This time it seemed to be a new type that was the fusion of a <Wyvern> and a <Drake>, it was a specification that was suited for the mission this time where they would search and investigate inside a ship where there would be many passages.

「Airi..... Be careful okay?」

「I understand. Noct is planning to accompany me to protect me, but it's fine even if Nii-san is a bit concerned for me you know?」

She must be uneasy entering a ruin with her flesh body, but she pretended to be tough instead.

Lux had a complicated feeling seeing his sister who pretended to be all right in this kind of time so as to not worry him.

Right after that, the circle where Lux and others were standing on was tinged with faint light.

「.....Everyone! Is your preparations all right?」

When Celis raised her voice as the group leader, the members put themselves on guard reflexively.

Right after that, a blinding light pillar rose up high into the sky, and Lux's field of vision was enveloped in white.

Part 9

- splash*

Such sound of water hit the ears the moment they came to.

After a lapse of awareness that was only for a few seconds, when they noticed, Lux and the others were standing in a dim place.

There wasn't any cover or anything nearby. Humid air was filling the surroundings.

The surrounding was dim, there were only bluish white strange lights that dotted the surrounding bit by bit.

「.....-!？」

The ground was bobbing up and down, and also perhaps when they were taken in the air above the deck was also brought in together with them, because the peculiar smell of the seashore stabbed the nose.

(Besides, what's this? This presence.....)

There was one more thing, a disquieting presence of something that Lux sensed. He quickly moved to the side of Airi who wasn't wearing any protection.

「Noct, can you do it?」

When Sharis raised a tensed voice inside the dim space,

「Yes, my lord. Confirming the reaction of Abyss organisms using the <Drake>, please wait for a bit.」

Noct and the other members who were wearing the special type Drag-Ride, <Drake>, were carrying out enemy searches and confirmed the safety of the surroundings.

After that, when each Drag-Ride turned on their search lights, the

surrounding was illuminated brightly and the sight inside the ship became clear.

Syvalles's members who had secured their field of vision were about to let out a sigh of relieve, it was then—

「Eh—!？」

「Wa, wait, just what is..... this？」

The eyes of the girls were opened wide in surprise, and their bodies that were clad with armor were trembling.

Lux also felt the same, but he immediately changed his thought.

「What, is this.....？」

Lisha who confirmed her vicinity a bit delayed knitted her brows after seeing that sight.

Destruction.

There were depressions here and there, a large amount of inorganic substance smashed and scattered apart.

Due to the countless rubble with incomprehensible shape, there wasn't even any place for their feet to step on.

「According to the document, this space is called the lounge. For now it looks like we have accomplished our first objective of entering safely.」

Airi looked around timidly while informing the others of that.

The structure of the third Ruin, the Ark, was comparatively easy to understand.

The only facts that had been proven was that this Ruin was divided into eleven levels, that there were stairs that continued to the next level located at the bow and the stern of the ship, and , from the investigations, the floor where they were transported onto from the deck was numbered as the first floor, while the lower floors after it were numbered as the second floor, and so on.

Although there should also be a lot of fork roads midway, there was basically stairs that connected to the upper and lower level on each floor.

「It's great that all of us are safe, headmaster.」

Dobar and his private force called out to them from a slight distance away.

「It seems that the traces of fighting in the ancient times remain here. Let us both be careful.」

「Yes, may fortune be with you.」

After Relie returned a smile. Dobar bowed with「Well then」 and left with his men.

Similarly, Lux and the others who confirmed the presence and safety of all their members also started their march.

In order to shoulder the role of exploration, enemy search, and lighting the path, two <Drakes> and three other Drag-Rides were kept as they were, while the remaining members desummoned their armor.

This was a method to preserve their stamina while marching in shifts.

「Well, I understand that this is a safe plan but, how should I say it, this is really sluggish ain't it, going slowly like this.」

Tillfur who was wearing a <Wurm> was grumbling from the tediousness.

Her job was to remove the rubble using her Drag-Ride's power and secure the route, but it seemed she was tired of that and felt annoyed.

「It can't be helped. There is a chance that the Abyss or traps are hidden under the rubble.」

Sharis immediately soothed her. Noct also sent a glance to Tillfur.

「Yes. The <Drake> is recording the shortest route that has been confirmed as safe, so when we come here next time all of us will be able to wear our Drag-Rides and advance several dozen times faster.」

「We are moving to the stern from the first floor's lounge. There are several areas midway, but a lot of the walls are destroyed, so the path became hard to comprehend.」

Airi who was memorizing the Ruin's information sometimes gave an explanation while she was moving her legs.

And then, Lux was worried about Philuffy who was walking beside him.

「Philuffy. Is your body all right? You aren't tired?」

「Yes.」

The answer from Philuffy that was said with her usual expressionless face was hard to read whether she was saying the truth or not.

After they walked forward silently, at the stern of the first floor—they found the stairs that continued to the second floor and they went down.

Even though the level change, the scenery was basically unchanged.

The bluish white lighting, the dimness of the area, and the dreadful trace of destruction were also the same as before.

Marquis Dobar said that it was the traces of a battle from the ancient times but—

「Lux-kun, did you notice? This trace of destruction.」

「Yes..... Somehow, but—it looks new doesn't it?」

Lux nodded in return towards the whisper of Krulcifer who was walking beside him.

Lisha who was walking in the lead heard that and she turned around.

「What is it?」

「Don't mind us. Right now it's still just conjecture.」

「Don't leave me in suspense like that! You made me excessively curious here you know!?」

Lisha spontaneously flared up at Krulcifer, it was then,

「Everyone, please stop.」

Airi's voice that was tinged with nervousness made everyone hold their breaths.

「This is.....?」

When the light from Noct's <Drake> shined forward, there was a huge space before their eyes.

The surrounding was covered with something that looked like hard glass, with

a half-dome ceiling.

It was a boundary that displayed that from here on ahead was a completely different domain.

「What's this? Is it a room or something?」

「This is a section that is called a Biome Sphere. It looks like it's running an independent ecosystem, as though it's a natural forest. Although.....」

Airi was explaining with an ancient text in one hand, however at the end her words turned ambiguous.

The answer was apparent from a glimpse.

「Looks like there was a really fierce battle in the past. Besides, it seems that the functions of the Ruin that maintained this ecosystem are completely suspended.」

When Krulcifer whispered so, Lisha also nodded and she raised her voice.

「Noct, can you see any signs of enemies nearby?」

「No. I had increased my enemy search range to maximum since some time ago, but there is no presence of the Abyss. The force of Marquis Dobar is located around 300 mel ahead on a different route.」

「Looks like they are advancing quickly, but I think we can overtake them soon.」

Relie who heard that let out a sigh of relieve,

「But, from here on is where it really starts.」

She stared at the Biome Sphere spreading before their eyes and continued with that sentence.

The devastated state of the ecosystem increased the complexity of the path. Added with the rock, soil, and the uneven ground, it was like there was a natural labyrinth blocking the way of intruders.

And then, the vegetation that were growing densely and abundantly turned into a shade. They couldn't even see several dozen mel ahead of them.

「Looks like it will take time to search for the correct path from here on ahead.」

If there is no signs of the Abyss, I think that we should split to search though—」

「Guess so. Then for now let's split into a team of three or four people and begin exploring in four directions. If anyone finds something, send contact using Dragon Voice. Okay?」

Relie agreed with Krulcifer's suggestion and the members formed their own teams.

Their grouping was decided beforehand based on the number of people. Lux, Noct, and Airi were in one group.

「Take care of me, Noct.」

「Yes. I judged that being grouped with Lux-san is a really fortunate event. It's me that should ask you to take care of me.」

Noct bowed with a bob of her head, her expression calm as usual.

Lux was wearing a <Wyvern> while Noct was wearing a <Drake>. They advanced ahead in order to guard Airi.

Lux was the eldest person present, so he took a deep breath to fire himself up, it was then, 「Nii-san. Please don't lay your hand on my roommate too just because there is no one else around okay?」

「No, why are you talking as though I'm always wooing girls!?」

「Yes. I understand Airi's feeling that is worried that your brother might be taken from you by everyone, but I judge that your statement just now was only a needless anxiety.」

「Wai..... please don't say something strange so suddenly Noct!」

Not minding Airi who was unusually flustered, Noct continued.

「Surely Lux-san is not seeing me as a girl. I'm someone who is expected to serve the Baltshift family after I graduate. Something like love is inconsequential, but for me to be outside being a target of love already at this age, is a bit depressing. Haa.....」

She sounded a bit like she was reading in monotone, but it was also rare for Noct to talk in pessimism like that, so Lux got driven by guilt.

「Tha, that's not true. I think that Noct is also really cute.....」

「.....Is that so? Then more specifically, from Lux-san's point of view, which part of me is charming?」

「E, err, that..... Well, the line from your collarbone until your chest, is really—」

「Nii-san.....do you remember what I just talked about?」

When Lux said that while looking at Noct in her suit, Airi retorted with a chilly expression.

「Yes. I think that Lux-san ought to be a bit more careful when dealing with females. That way of praising that feels indecent, Lux-san might get accused as someone obscene and get tricked by someone because of it.」

「Even though I did my best to give praise, you are picking faults in it, and on top of that you also tricked me-!?」

Lux plainly felt shocked from being toyed around by a girl who was his junior and he hung his head down.

Beside him Airi was,

「I'm relieved in a sense. Usually Nii-san was praised to the sky of how cool you are, but as I thought Nii-san is someone like this in truth.」

Like that, she was somewhat in acceptance.

(Fo, for some reason I'm feeling very vexed.....-! She is hitting right on the mark.....) Lux was anguished so inside his heart, it was then,

「.....」

He noticed Noct was watching over Airi who was walking beside her with a small smile on her lips.

『Can we talk for a bit?』

『.....? What business do you have, to use Dragon Voice at this kind of distance?』

The Dragon Voice was a communication method through the medium of a Drag-Ride.

When Lux sent a Dragon Voice limited to Noct beside him, she sent back a questioning voice to him.

『Don't tell me, Lux-san is going to secretly send me an obscene verbal abuse that you cannot say in front of Airi—!』

『That's not it-!? Just how indecent of a person am I!?』

『Yes. I know. Lux-san is quite an indecent person despite your face that looks harmless, but I don't think that you have that kind of guts.』

『.....』

As always it felt like he was being toyed around by Noct, but he somehow endured it and continued his words.

『That.....thank you. You were intentionally making cheerful talk for the sake of Airi who is uneasy because this is her first time exploring a Ruin, right?』

Thereupon, Noct showed an amazed face for a moment as though she was taken by surprise, but, 『No. That's not it. I was merely wanting to make fun of Lux-san. That's why, I think there isn't any need for me to be thanked.』

Her expression immediately returned to her usual composed face and she answered like that.

Even so Lux said his thanks with a smile.

『It's really a big help, Noct.』

That Noct was denying her consideration towards Airi must be because of her pride as someone who descended from a lineage of family attendants.

Covering up for the master and guest without being noticed was the family precept of Noct's family. It was something that Lux remembered hearing from Tillfur who was also of the Triad.

『I only need to be appreciated by my master, so it's unnecessary for Lux-san to be concerned for me.』

Noct replied like that through the Dragon Voice with her usual calm tone.

『I see.』

『—But, a part of me that is outside my position, feels just a bit happy hearing

those words.】

But, she gave such response to Lux while showing a faint smile.

『If Lux-san becomes my employer, it looks like it will be difficult to act in a casual manner doesn't it?】

『Eh.....?】

『I'm joking. Rather than that—】

Suddenly the presence of Noct who was walking beside him changed.

「Please stop, both of you.】

Noct used her physical voice this time to let out a voice that was tinged with tension.

Airi backed away while Lux readied his blade and stepped forward, then,

「It's not an Abyss..... but, under the rubble a few hundred mel ahead from here, there is a human-like shape present there. There is no heat or movement reaction, perhaps it's some kind of trap..... it can also be something like that.】

「Got it. I'll go look.】

Lux didn't wait for any reply and flew his <Wyvern>.

If it was by any chance a corpse, he didn't want to show it to Airi, but—

「.....-!?】

Lux who lifted up the huge rubble doubted his eyes reflexively.

That human shape which was laying down on the ground was beautiful.

It was a green haired girl wearing a dress with strange silver lines. She was lying down as though she was sleeping.

She looked like she was around eleven or twelve years old, her figure was young and petite.

Her well-ordered features, combined with her silently closed pair of eyes made Lux vaguely feel a mystique atmosphere from the girl.

Of course, her clothes and skin were dirtied with mud, showing how long the years had passed for the girl, even so she looked so beautiful it was unthinkable

that she had died.

And then there was a mechanical decoration that was designed like bunny ears on her small head.

「Is everything all right, Lux-san?」

While Lux was staring at the girl half in a daze, Noct and Airi caught up with him.

「This is.....!? This child, what on earth—」

As expected, even Airi seemed to have no clue, she was speechless after catching the sight of the girl.

Under the bluish white lighting that was like the moonlight, that place was filled with silence for a while, but, 「Noct, is Krulcifer-san's group nearby?」

「There is reaction in the location 200 mel from here. It seems she is not wearing <Fafnir>, but it's possible to contact her if I send a Dragon Voice to a member in her group.」

「Thank you. Can you call her for me?」

「Roger. —But, why her?」

Noct was having a bit of doubt even while she was quickly taking action. To that Lux, 「Just a bit of something.....」

He returned an ambiguous reply.

<Fafnir> came flying in less than a minute after Noct sent the communication.

Perhaps it should be said as expected from a user of a Divine Drag-Ride, she came flying in at high speed through a dark path where the ceiling was low and trees and rocks were lined up.

「You said that you found something mysterious but, what is it I wonder?」

As soon as Krulcifer who finally arrived saw it, her usual cool voice vanished.

「This is..... No, this child is?」

「We don't know. But, I thought that if it's Krulcifer-san who has seen the Ruin in Ymir, then you might know something.....」

「.....」

Krulcifer stiffened with her gaze still fixed seriously on the girl.

Her reaction was understandable, Lux thought.

For Krulcifer whose origin was from a Ruin, this girl might be her brethren that she was unable to find throughout all these long years.

This was her first time seeing with her own eyes that body existing for real.

「Even the ancient text I am translating doesn't record the existence of someone like this. What do you think, Krulcifer-san?」

Airi who had been pondering until now seemed to grow restless and asked that.

「It's dangerous.」

Suddenly such whisper leaked out from Krulcifer's mouth.

「The two of you, can you join up with the group I was with before? There is a chance you can get entangled into danger by staying here.」

「Eh.....?」

Krulcifer's face returned to her usual expression. Her long beautiful hair shook and she continued.

「In the past, I heard about a story that there might be a human shaped trap in the Ruin of Ymir. I'll try to examine this girl right now, but if a battle ensues, it will be difficult to protect you.」

「.....I understand.」

Having been told that, Airi left that place together with Noct even though she looked reluctant.

After the figure of the two completely vanished, Lux raised his face.

「Krulcifer-san. What you said just now—」

「Yes, of course it's a lie.」

Krulcifer said nonchalantly.

She was a girl who originated from a Ruin. She was someone who was

standing in a peculiar position. Her true identity couldn't be exposed that lightly toward anyone.

If that secret was leaked out from somewhere, then fellows who would try to use her existence would appear and she would be aimed at, just like how Lux's secret as the Black Hero was.

He didn't think that Airi and Noct would blab, but there was also a precedent like the existence of Saniya in Syvalles, so they couldn't let their guard down.

「Sorry. Even though I need to pay attention to something like this.」

Lux thought so and he tried to apologize, but then,

「Don't worry about it. Rather than that, this child.....isn't a human is she?」

「Eh.....?」

Krulcifer told the perplexed Lux with her usual calm and collected expression.

「Of course, she is also not an Abyss. I cannot think of any adequate definition but—」

Krulcifer was caressing the girl's cheek while talking ambiguously. Right after that, the little girl's golden eyes opened with a snap.

〔Supervisor's living reaction is confirmed. System reboot.〕

It was an inorganic voice that resembled a heavy metallic sound.

At the same time the dress with strange silver lines running through it fluttered and the girl got up.

「-.....!?」

Lux and Krulcifer who were wearing Drag-Rides reflexively took a distance quickly. They readied their respective weapons.

When they directed the greatest vigilance towards the standing up girl,

「.....Eh?」

The girl turned her head left and right restlessly, she was staring at Lux and

Krulcifer, then at the completely devastated sight of the surroundings, after that—

- bam*

Suddenly the girl fell prostate on the ground.

「I'm sorry. Looks like no one is calling for me here..... Good night.」

「Wait a second!? Why are you collapsing again!?」

「I, I wish you won't misunderstand, I don't have any memory at all regarding this disastrous scene. But still, I have a hunch that this is surely not my fault, so if possible I want to beg to not get disposed of, but just a program correction is.....」

「.....She is suddenly starting to shift responsibility. Just who in the world is this girl?」

Krulcifer turned towards the girl with a questioning expression, then,

「Eh.....? By any chance, you don't know about me, XferKey's Supervisor-sama?」

The girl said an incomprehensible thing like that.

「I don't know. More importantly, what are you? Your name?」

「This is, my deepest apologies. My name is La Cruche. The Gear LeaderController of this Ark. To explain it in an easier to understand term, I am the personification of the system that is governing this facility—an existence that everyone calls an Automaton. Pleased to make your acquaintance from here on.」

She bowed reverently like a maid that was serving her master.

Judging from her behavior, it seemed that the relatives of Krulcifer were in the positions as the ones who managed the Ruin.

The system's Automaton that remained inside the Ruin.

Until now they had never heard of such an existence in the history of any country.

If this girl's words were the truth, then this might be the first contact with someone who knew about the history of the ancient era.

「Lux-kun. Perhaps, we are—」

「Yes.....」

Lux also understood the meaning of Krulcifer's anxious voice.

The moment he realized that, Lux's heart was also pounding fiercely.

The existence of the Ruins that were mostly wrapped in mystery until now, that mystery might be solved in its entirety right now in this place.

「Then you, you know about everything of the ancient era?」

Krulcifer's impatient voice shook the forest's air.

「.....」

A moment later, the Automaton who introduced herself as La Cruche tilted her head and made a thinking posture.

「Regarding my memory of the past, my deepest apology but—」

Amidst the fierce tension where one hesitated to even breath.

「.....It looks like I overslept too much that I seriously forget it. Really, sorry.」

The machine girl said so with a slightly apologetic look, she then bowed her head down.

「.....」

「.....」

「Aah, I beg of you, don't look at me with those kinds of eyes. Also please don't scrap me. I really don't remember anything. It appears that because of this unknown incident, my memory data was completely blown away temporarily, it's true!」



La Cruche desperately made excuses after seeing Krulcifer's chilly gaze.

They didn't really understand, but it seemed this girl also had a personality, or the concept to protect herself at the very least.

「We don't have any such intention, but we want to question you a little.」

After letting out a little sigh, Krulcifer questioned La Cruche, and La Cruche answered her.

First, the girl was the Gear Leader of the Ark and an Automaton. She was connected to the central of this Ruin and it was possible for her to manage the Ruin.

She recognized Krulcifer as a XferKey's Supervisor that was the constructor of the Ruin, and she was intending to obey Krulcifer's will and command.

And then the last, because of the impact from the incident that occurred in this Ruin in the past, La Cruche confessed that it seemed she lost her past memory.

「Forgive me. Originally as the Gear Leader, I should be able to connect to the central right away if the main unit is safe, and from there it's possible to recover my memory but.....」

The girl exaggeratedly prostrated herself and apologized.

「I can mostly imagine the cause. Most likely it's the same cause that made this room dimly lighted like this, the majority of the Ark's functions right now are being suspended, is that it?」

「Tha, that's right. As expected from Xfer-sama. You are not only beautiful, but you are also really wise.」

La Cruche's rabbit-like ears were moving twitchily and she jumped on the spot.

Krulcifer who saw that made a slightly wry smile and she patted the girl's head.

「I don't need flattery. I still don't understand what kind of relationship ought to exist between us, but you can talk to me more casually you know?」

「Those words are too good for me. Then, while presumptuous of me, I wish to express an advice so that you can become more beautiful. Xfer-sama is a bit too thin. I think that if you eat a bit more meat, then a part of that humble body of yours might be improved—」

La Cruche spoke with a cheerful smile, but it felt like the air suddenly froze and cracked.

「..... Come to think of it, in the end you don't know about anything essential don't you? In other words even if you are destroyed here, it won't be any inconvenience for us—is my understanding correct?」

「My, my deepest apologies-!? I only have this one personality, so if it's possible that I can receive mercy—」

(S, so, Krulcifer-san is actually bothered about that.....)

Seeing the chilly smile Krulcifer displayed, Lux swore inside his heart to absolutely not touch on this kind of topic with her.

「And, what should we do to restore that thing you called the central system?」

「Ye, yes. By going to the control room area and have Xfer-sama authenticate there, it's possible to give out the restoration command after that.」

「Where is that place called the control room area located?」

Lux held his breath while waiting for the answer that Krulcifer asked dispassionately.

「Everything is located right before the deepest level of the Ark in the underground eleventh level, the tenth level—if we can go there, we will understand everything.」

La Cruche reverently bowed her head and declared.

Part 10

「Does that kind of girl really exist? I cannot believe it right away.」

An hour after Lux and Krulcifer parted from the Automaton(La Cruche).

After exiting the Biome Sphere, everyone reached the sixth floor. After that they returned to the surface before sunset.

They encountered and fought Abyss only two times since they infiltrated the Ruin until they reached the sixth floor. The Abyss were in the weak category, so their advance was favorable.

After that, they had dinner early. In the information report meeting they carried out at the boardinghouse, Lux and Krulcifer informed Relie about La Cruche.

「Her appearance is like a girl, but she is undoubtedly a doll that was created with the ancient technology. She—La Cruche herself is the Gear Leader of the Ark, so she cannot leave the Ruin thoughtlessly, that was what she said.」

It seemed that it would be possible for her to come out once the Ruin's system was restored, but at the present time it was impossible so they parted for the moment.

However, they had arranged for a place and time to meet again, so there should be no problem to reunite with her.

「And—where is that girl right now?」

「I told her to hide in a room at the sixth floor's residential area, because it feels like it will become complicated if she meets with Marquis Dobar's group.」

「I see..... It's fine if we can meet her tomorrow but, if possible I wanted to see her today.」

「The Ruin's Automaton huh, it's really interesting that there is even the

existence of a machine doll.]

Continuing after Relie, Lisha muttered so.

「But, according to the story of Lux-kun and Krulcifer-missy, what the girl knows is few anyway until we recover her memory, right? It's better like this rather than having everyone gathering there and barraging the girl with questions instead.]

The leader of the Triad, Sharis concluded like that in the end.

Their objective this time was reaching the deepest floor in the end.

Seeing how La Cruche lost her memory, it was pointless to investigate about her until they reached the control room area and restored the system.

「At any rate, today was reeeeally tiring. The training was hard, then strange people also came, and the Ruin investigation is wearing down the nerve—」

When Tillfur fell prostrated on the table and grumbled like that, the headmaster Relie lifted her face.

「Then, the sun has also set while we were talking, how about we have the fun talk now?」

「What is it now headmaster? I'm already at my limit here..... After this I also have my personal work so—」

Perhaps because they were always hearing troublesome talk from Relie, Lisha was being alert towards her.

「My? So you are going to abstain? That's too bad. Even though we can finally enter the island's hotspring—」

When Relie said that mischievously, the fatigued everyone got excited a moment later.

「Eeeeeeh!? Is that true-!?」

「If I remember right, it's reserved just for us right!?」

「We can enter now!? The preparation—」

The selection members raised their voices. Even Celis and Krulcifer's eyes were secretly shining.

It was difficult to secure fresh water in Ries Island, so there was no bathtub here like in Cross Field. They were basically making do with just wiping their bodies so far, but as expected, for girls their age taking a bath was something they really had a zest for.

Especially when it was entering a hot spring. In the New Kingdom, few people had such experience.

「I understand your feelings, but calm down a little. Even here all of you are the students of the Royal Officer Academy you know? Please act more gracefully like a noble lady.」

Relie said that to the excited girls and calmed them down.

(I think that Relie-san is the one who is not acting like a headmaster the most though.....) Lux wanted to say that, but he somehow endured it and listened to the talk.

It seemed that the maintenance work of the hot spring that was carried out since the day they arrived on the island had finished just now.

It was fully reserved for them, so after this everyone would go to enter it right away but—

「Lux-kun. Can I talk with you a bit?」

When the girls were heading to their shared room in order to prepare entering the bath right away, Relie was staying behind by herself and called out to Lux.

「Eh? Relie-san isn't going to enter after this?」

「I'll do that later. This training camp is a rare chance, so I want them to enjoy themselves without an adult present. Or else— does Lux-kun want to enter together with me?」

「Look here.....」

Seeing Lux's troubled face, Relie let out a small chuckle.

Her teasing him like this hadn't changed since the past.

「This is a special request to protect everyone. It's great that the hot spring can be entered, but there is something a bit troubling too.」

「Something troubling?」

「Yes, can you come with me for a bit? I'll explain your special job.」

Part 11

Ten-odd minutes later.

- splash*

Such water sound shook the night air of the quiet Ries Island.

White vapor enshrouded the surrounding area, the sound of waves that could be heard from afar brought small elegance with it.

The selection members added with Airi numbered twelve people in total. They soaked inside the milky white hot water together.

The maintenance and the management of the hot spring was difficult, so it was left alone for a while, but thanks to the workers Relie brought with her, the hot spring was completely put in order.

The place was cramped but there was also a washing place, while the surrounding was fenced with a high board fence.

The color of the hot spring's hot water made it difficult to see through, but Lisha entered the hot water with a towel wrapped around her waist so that the mark on her abdomen wouldn't be seen.

「Haaa. It's different from the bath in the girls dormitory, there is this feeling of liberation with the sky visible like this.」

Tillfur who wrapped her hair with a towel without even trying to hide her nakedness muttered in satisfaction.

「Yes. This is the first time I entered a bath like this, this is really interesting.」

When Noct muttered back in response, her classmate Airi smiled too,

「You're right. Though everyone's style is nice, so it's a bit embarrassing.....」

She said that while pressing her reserved breasts.

「Fuh, the youth of the juniors is really envious isn't it, Celis?」

When Sharis muttered that with deep feeling, beside her Celis made a doubtful face.

「I think that you are usually acting relatively childish though.....」

「Oh, now you've said it. Then I'll fool around like a kid! Eat this, how's that!」

「Please stop! Our juniors are watching!」

Celis struggled and brushed away the hands of Sharis who moved to touch her breasts.

Krulcifer watched that while saying 「How lively」 with a smile.

「—But, he is a bit pitiful. Although it can't be helped, he has to enter alone later.」

When Krulcifer whispered with slight sympathy entering her voice, Tillfur nodded behind her.

「I guess.But see, I feel sorry for Lux-chi, but there is also some talk we can do because there is no boy nearby right?」

「Eh.....?」

Several students including Krulcifer reacted towards that suggestive statement, then, 「Yosh! Then, because this kind of chance rarely comes, how about we open up a confession convention, about how does everyone think about Lux-chi!?」

「Eeeee.....!?」

Everyone who was soaked in the hot water stiffened from hearing Tillfur's suggestion.

「Then, I'll start as the one who suggested it. Nnn, Lux-chi really feels like a great prince I think. His manner is pleasant. Then even though he is an imperial family member of the Old Empire, he ain't putting on an air at all. Also.....well, ain't matter! Yes, next person please!」

For some reason Tillfur's words were ambiguous at the end before she moved the talk towards Noct beside her.

Noct stared still doubtfully at Tillfur for a while, but she was helpless against the stare from the surroundings and she nodded.

「Yes. I guess so. I think that Lux-san is a really interesting person. Normally he is someone whose position will make you hesitate to call out to him, but when you are beside him, for some reason you will want to call out to him.」

「Hee, even Noct who looks like she doesn't have any interest in boys is conscious towards him too?」

Sharis who soaked in hot water with her upper body above the water surface said that to Noct teasingly, but, 「I would be lying if I said that I'm not somewhat interested as a person, but in the first place I don't understand about the emotion of love itself.」



「That means, that you're expecting for an impetus from here on, is that it?」

「By the way what about Sharis?」

Against Noct's counterattack, Sharis pfftet and her cheeks loosened,

「Right. The first time I met him, I only saw that he had a cute face but..... right now he is a junior that is worthy of trust. It will be fun if a child like him is my little brother.」

After she asserted so with an earnest tone, she directed her eyes towards everyone around.

「Well then, that's all from us. How about we now listen from the main cast? First is, Krulcifer-missy.」

Krulcifer who soaked in hot water at a slight distance away slowly raised her face towards that question.

「It feels like you three were also avoiding the crucial part but,well, it's fine. Regarding about how do I feel about him, I don't need to use that many words to express my feelings.」

「Hou」

Sharis showed her interest.

「Wha, what does that mean Krulcifer!? Don't tell me, you are still thinking about things like wanting to become Lux's lover or something—」

Lisha who soaked in another spot cut in with her yell.

「He is someone important to me. I also want him to feel the same about me. That's all.」

Krulcifer asserted that with a cool face.

「Uwaaa. Krulcifer-san, that's really adult like.....」

Tillfur muttered that. The expressions of everyone around was also in a daze for some reason.

「And you, how do you feel I wonder, about him?」

When Krulcifer moved the talk to Lisha, Lisha quickly dipped herself into the

water until her shoulder. She then entangled her fingers fidgetingly while her cheeks were blushing red.

「E, even if you ask me how do I feel..... That, my feelings swell up when he is staying by my side, and when he praises me, I feel like, really happy..... He is a man that makes me want to work hard, like, because I want to experience that feeling more—」

「Somehow, it's us who were listening that got embarrassed when hearing that kind of speech.....」

When Airi whispered so with a complicated look, beside her Noct turned her gaze to Airi.

「As the one closest to him, what does Airi think?」

「For me, Nii-san is Nii-san. He is my only blood relative, so I don't have any special feelings or anything like that about it.」

Airi answered like that without hesitation towards the question from Noct.

「But, recently Nii-san gets overestimated a little bit too much. Even though setting aside his strength, he is actually a really clumsy and introverted person..... As his little sister, I feel a little complicated in regards to that.」

「Even though it'd be better if you just honestly say that you don't wanna have him get taken away.」

「Tha, that, the next person—what about Celis-senpai?」

When Tillfur spoke teasingly like that, Airi moved the talk toward Celis in a hurry.

「I, I also need to speak!? Tha, that, cannot be permitted.....! This training camp is something important for the sake of the international tournament, so I think we ought to take our bath quietly and restore our energy.」

「Celis. Your opinion is correct, but don't you think that you are setting a bad example to our juniors if you say that after listening to everyone's talk until this far? As the leader of Syvalles, I think the correct attitude here is to take up the gauntlet fair and square.」

「Ah, uu.....」

When Celis was hesitating to say something from Sharis's retort,

「That's right! Please tell us!」

「It's unfair if it's only captain Celis who doesn't talk!」

The members called out like that one after another.

「The, then just for a little..... He is a really reliable boy, so, it's like I want to know more about him—. Incidentally I also want to take the opportunity to be taught a lot regarding boys. For the sake of my growth too.....」

「.....」

The girls went silent for a while after hearing Celis squeezing out those words timidly, 「I really misjudged you Celis. For you, the captain to make that kind of erotic confession is—」

「Ho, how do you perceive it like that-!? I'm just, for the sake of everyone」

「Yes. Captain Celis is only being a bit self-unaware. If the other party isn't Lux-san, then she might really have had indecent things done to her already a long time ago.」

While the talk was suddenly tinged with such fever, Lisha's gaze suddenly turned towards Philuffy's absentminded face.

「Come to think of it, what about you? Other than the little sister, it's only you who knows about Lux in the past, right?」

「.....」

Towards that question, Philuffy held back from speaking for a while,

「Lu-chan is, Lu-chan you know?」

She declared like that with a serious face.

「No, not that. In other words, that.....I'm asking what kind of feelings you're harboring towards Lux—」

When Lisha continued asking with an exasperated face,

- rustle-.....*

Such sound from a bush suddenly came into hearing. Everyone ducked their bodies into the water and raised their vigilance.

The hot spring's surrounding was half covered with a fence, while the other half was surrounded with boulders, but someone could come closer from outside.

Of course there was rope stretched around the area with notice board that it was forbidden to enter, to clear out the people but—

「I don't think that anyone will come here but, would it be better if we prepare some kind of countermeasure?」

Celis grabbed a stone the size of a person's head, her voice tone was tinged with tension. But Krulcifer stopped her.

「It's fine. If it's just a simple peeping tom, then he surely will do something about it.」

「He.....?」

The moment Lisha tilted her head, the dull scream of a man could be heard.

Part 12

Around the time Lisha and the others who were in the middle of a bath heard a man's scream, there was a battle ensuing at a road inside the forest that led towards the hot spring's fence.

「Guaah.....! I, it was my bad! Let go of me.....」

「I cannot. Please be quiet..... And done.」

Lux kept his hold on the hands of the young man while tying the man's feet and hands with a rope, binding him on the nearby tree.

A while after that when Lux returned to his given position, he let out a small sigh.

「Fuu..... It's the eleventh person with this.....」

Lux's special mission that was given by Relie was to catch the men of this island who came to peep.

Because half of the hot spring was surrounded by boulders, this was the only path that led toward the fence.

But even after Relie told him that, Lux was half in doubt whether anyone would really come, on this island with its small population, but in the end his prediction was greatly betrayed.

Perhaps there was an islander who excelled in information gathering, or perhaps it was because on this small island any happening would immediately get told to the nearby people, because a lot of people starting from a young man around Lux's age, a middle aged merchant, a carpenter in the prime of his life, and even a white haired old man gathered in this place.

Even Lux had accumulated considerable training in hand-to-hand combat, so he somehow managed to apprehend everyone, but,

「Oi you! I don't know who you are! But, are you fine with this-!？」

The captured young man around Lux's age yelled towards Lux while still being tied to the tree.

「What do you mean by that?」

Even though Lux didn't need to respond, but he replied back honestly.

「You, you must be a staff of the academy..... but you're a man right!? Just what are you thinking not peeping using this chance of your lifetime huh-!？」

「.....No, that's a crime.」

Lux answered properly after thinking about it for a moment.

By the way, perhaps because the surrounding was dark, it seemed the man didn't notice Lux's hair and eye color, and also the criminal choker on his neck, and the man didn't notice that Lux was the Chore Prince.

But,

「That's right-! When I was young, I climbed down the rock cliff naked, I went to peep even with my life in danger.....」

The white haired old man who heard the young man raised his voice in response.

「Exactly! Kids these days are pathetic-! Did you lose even your balls just because you have a girly looking face, huh!?」

The carpenter in the prime of his life also joined in.

「Wai-, please wait a second!? It's not like I—」

「Oi brat, don't you want to see the naked body of those young ladies-!? They are the beautiful girls of that Academy you know, where the aristocrat daughters are gathered!」

「That's right, can't you understand our feelings that is trying to chase after the endless romance-!?」

It was absurd.....

Lux was exasperated, however because he was a man, it wasn't like he didn't

understand their feelings.

There was still a bit of time for the girls' turn in the bath.

If he approached until near the wooden fence that surrounded the bath, there should be a crack where he might be able to catch a sight of the girls.

And then it was dark inside the forest, it should be difficult for the girls inside the bath to notice him.

「.....Wait, just what am I thinking!? No way I can do that!」

Lux who was about to imagine that scene for a moment shook his head flusteredly.

In the first place, this was a request that Relie appointed to him because she said he was someone that could be trusted.

However, when he could hear the sound of hot water and the voices of the girls making merry, he got curious no matter what.

Before Lux went to guard this place, he met Krulcifer and she said to him 『If you want you can enter together with me secretly later you know?』 teasingly, so his feelings were heating up even more.

Surely that was a joke, but it was bad for his heart.

Lux passed the third night of the training camp with his mood in anguish like that.

Part 13

Under the same dark sky of the night.

「.....I see, so those bitches already overtook us. That's unfortunate.」

At the dock of Ries Island, the sound of sea breeze and surging waves could be heard.

In that place far away from the base of Lux and the others, there were the figures of Marquis Dobar and his private forces.

「We have no excuse. For us who aren't used to Ruin investigations, also coupled with our encounter with the Abyss, it will be hard to raise our speed further than this.」

A man in the prime of his life who seemed to be the leader of the group made his report quietly.

「I see, it's something that I have anticipated beforehand. Don't worry.」

In contrast Dobar showed a large-hearted smile without any sign of impatience.

Dobar's post in the New Kingdom was as an adviser to the military, but he almost had no experience in commanding in a real battle.

He was a man who was rising up only by buttering up the strong, disdaining the weak, and made liberal use of trickery.

The person himself was almost powerless in using a Drag-Ride or in battle.

But, the man who was the group's leader thought that this man's point of favor was that he understood about that fact Therefore, even in the mission this time to snatch the treasures of the Ruin, Dobar wasn't hastily doing anything reckless but—

「Then, let's triple our marching speed tomorrow. We will choose only the

shortest route that is easy to pass through.]

Dobar showed a smile that filled his whole face which distorted his flabby cheeks.

「-.....!？」

That very reckless plan caused the leader's face to cramp.

It was his first time questioning the sanity of his master since he worked for this man named Dobar.

「With all due respect, certainly we will be able to progress faster if we choose the path that is easier to travel. But, doing that will raise our encounter rate with the Abyss, if we move at high speed through a path where our sight is obstructed, it might cause various incidents. With our force's composition and the troop's proficiency, our speed today is our limit—」

The leader took a deep breath and objected.

This kind of common sense was applied not only in the Ruin, but also when marching in an undeveloped area that had wild beasts or the Abyss living in it. Surely there was no way Dobar didn't know about that.

Therefore, the leader didn't understand about the true intention of his master who was trying to force his way.

When everyone present gulped their saliva nervously while observing Dobar's reaction—

「Ha-ha-ha-ha!」

After a pause of a few seconds, Dobar raised his voice and laughed out.

It wasn't a crazed laugh, but a bright voice.

The men of Dobar's private force showed a dubious face, it was then Dobar snapped his fingers towards the large ship behind him.

「No, sorry for that. Looks like I surprised everyone a little. Of course, I'm aware of the problem you mentioned. Don't worry.」

「Then..... our march tomorrow will be the same as today?」

「.....No, there is no change in what I said. Triple the speed, just like I said.」

Dobar's cheerful smile went through a round-about change and his eyes glared fiercely.

「It's not impossible if the unit's composition is focused on mobility. For the sake of the New Kingdom, no matter what method I have to use, I have to expose the deepest part of the Ruin!」

「Ho, however..... If we are lacking in vigilance and encounter a lot of the Abyss or traps, our forces might get annihilated. More than this is—」

- GAKIiiiiN*

A dull sound of scraping metals resounded. Dobar's private force all raised their faces.

A square lump of iron was dragged out by a <Wurm> from the military ship behind, it crossed over the ship and brought it to the land.

When the lump of iron was placed above a stand that was attached to a pulley and arrived before their eyes, the troops shuddered.

「Oo, it finally arrived. My trump card.」

「Trump card.....? Is it a new weapon? Or perhaps—」

The leader felt an air of unrest and reflexively asked that.

That box that could also be called as a lump of iron—.

No, that thing that was encircled by firm locks and chains looked like a cage.

「Open it.」

Dobar didn't reply and instead gave instructions to the soldiers lowering down the cargo.

The thick iron door was opened and the contents became clear.

「This is.....!?」

The men of Dobar's private forces became speechless after taking a glance.

It wasn't an armament, it also wasn't a Drag-Ride, it wasn't even a weapon.

It was a person.

A shackled black haired girl, her eyes blindfolded, and her body clad in a foreign outfit they had never seen before.

Not even caring about the binding that was painful to even look at, the girl's mouth was smiling.

「Gentlemen, I'll introduce her. This is the trump card that was hidden by that Old Empire Arkadia—she was called the Empire's Assassin Dagger, the worst and the strongest Drag-Knight.」



Episode 3 – Encounter

”The Assassin Blade of the Empire’.....Is, this girl——?”

Marquis Dobar who got off the boat, discovered that the content in the cage wasn’t a Drag-Ride, nor a weapon, but a girl.

Elegant black hair fluttered in the night wind; porcelain white skin that shined in the dark.

And, even under the cover of her veil, one could see at her noble beauty with just a glance.

With exotic foreign clothing that exposed a lot of skin, combined with her exquisite body, even if she restrained herself, she would unconsciously attract the attention of men.

Cause of this unexpected appearance, Dobar’s private army let out a puzzled voice.

“I’ve heard that before ... This is the real thing, right?”

“Isn’t it the same as “The Black Hero,” just a baseless rumor? The most important thing is that it could fight the Abyss ‘Ragnarok’ alone——”

” I also heard that when the Old Empire perished, he also died with it?”

In the middle of the night at the wharf, the soldiers whispered in discussion. Then the captain at the side forced a dry cough, quelling the noisy chatter.

”Hahaha. I understand your feelings. This old man is also skeptical about it.”

Dobar revealed a smile, the girl slowly walked towards the front of the soldiers.

”Just seven years ago, the place that was destroyed by the Old Empire and then ruled by the eastern island county——the Ancient Capital. After the fall of that country, the most skilled force under the Old Empire was this girl. She,

under the name of "the Assassin Blade of the Empire" completed missions in the dark, assassinated political enemies and destroyed rebel forces, at the same time eliminating groups of Abyss. Afterwards, she was imprisoned on the island, or presumably, as we have only heard it through rumors."

"....."

Both hands in cuff, the blindfolded girl quietly smiled.

"Staring tomorrow, this girl will join the ruins investigation. How do you feel? Kiri hime."

"There is no better feeling than what I feel right now."

The girl with her silver bell-like voice that vibrated the night sky immediately answered.

Her voice was without a trace of uneasiness, nor was excessive self-confidence, but only extremely calm.

However, feeling his subordinates were shaken, the captain took a step forward and asked.

"Sir, I'm sorry for interrupting you. I have indeed heard of "the Assassin Blade of the Empire," the rumors, but is this girl really—!?"

Instantly, the captain shut his mouth.

"Be a little more careful. You would have died if you slipped, right?"

A shinning tips appeared in front of the captain's throat.

The unique heritage sword of the eastern country Ancient Capital—called "blade" was pulled out in an instant by the girl.

However because she was blindfolded and was in handcuffs, pulling the sword from its sheath on her waist looked unnatural.

"Y, you.....!?"

The men in the army were about to pull out their Sword Devices.

However,

"Put away your swords. In any case, you guys cannot match this girl."

"Bu, but....."

Dobar calmly stopped them, the men also relented.

"Please forgive my rudeness."

The girl said with a polite voice and put away the sword pressed against the captain's throat.

"I'm somewhat of an impatient person, I got tired of this type of exchange a while ago. Thinking things like "can a child like this operate a Drag-Ride?" and "stop screwing around"—which is why, during times like this I will demonstrate my willpower and strength directly. Or alternatively, I'm fine with being exposed a bit more, you know? The strength of my [divine-equip drag-ride] is also—"

Carrying out acts of violence, the authenticity of which was difficult to determine, the young girl left the nearby soldiers feel aghast and be stated with indifference.

The blade in her hand emitted a faint light, and behind her appeared a Drag-Ride frame.

With her sealed vision and her hand constricted, she was still able to perform rapid actions like lightning.

This was the proof of her talent in swordsmanship as well as being a superior Drag-Knight.

Her power exceeded the combine strength of all the soldiers here and showed that she can complete her mission perfectly.

"I, I understand.....I have no more question"

"Thank you for your understanding."

The girl smiled politely.

"Then, if you please"

Dobar ordered his men to remove the handcuffs.

Then the girl personally removed the blindfold, her eyes showed in front of everyone.

"Oo.....!?"

At that moment, the troops lines exploded with whispers.

Slender and graceful eyes with different colored pupils.

Her right eye was like a bottomless blue sea. And on her left a mesmerizing violet jewel.

Although she was a peerless beauty, her strange smile made those who looked at her feel fear.

Because it reminded them of demons that did not belong to this world.

"Please feel free to call me anything you want, a sinner, or "the Assassin Blade of the Empire" or anything else.—Aa, if there is anyone still wants to call me by my name regardless, please call me as...."

The girl looked liked she danced in the moonlight turned around, smiled, and said.

"Kirihibe Yoruka...."

†

At the same time that night.

In the New kingdom Capital Lordgalia

That night, the King's conference room was filled with nobles and people of great importance.

There were 6.

The New Kingdom Queen Raffi and assistant prime minister Nulph.

Not counting the Kreutzer House which stepped down, there were also the heads of three of the Four Great Noble Families.

In addition, Shalice's father, the deputy commander of the army was also present.

The entire room was illuminated with candles and the castle were stationed with elite guards, such to show the importance of this military conference.

And as if the conference's atmosphere was affecting the outside, the Imperial

City was enveloped in a strange silence.

"So that absurd idea from before—that was called the 'Imperial Capital Recapture Plan', did you make a mistake?"

This man had a thin face and body similar to a skeleton that reminds people of a skinny and aging tree.

The oldest of the four nobles, the old man, Zagha Schultzed calmly ignited the fuse.

At first glance, it sounded like a polite question, but what it implied was very different from the attitude it let on.

He had lent his power to the Old Empire's in his twenties, and was one of the rare strong leaders during the era of war and struggle.

Known to quickly grab important intel and employ cunning strategies to benefit only himself, even if he was on their side, no one could effort to be careless.

Queen Raffi took a deep breath and answered his question.

"According to the report of the spies who went to Heiburg, that seems to be the case. The backbone of the rebel army—the fleeing Old Imperial Army was received by an independent force led by the army of Heiburg. Thus soon after, the rebel army will "retake" the throne—they once attacked the Imperial Capital for this."

Of course, Heiburg would not just help the rebel army.

After this, Heiburg would rule through the rebel army to indirectly dominate the Empire.

"Hmm....."

After the old gentleman responded, a burly man sitting next to him snorted.

"Fuh, isn't that the same as what we predicted. Just for this boring topic, you made me come to this meeting?"

"We are in Her Royal Highness's presence, Bugriser."

For the unsightly attitude of the burly man, Prime Minister Nulph reminded.

However, one of the four nobles – Bugriser Gashtoph – didn't take to mind, and laughed out loud.

"Oo, this is really rude. But ... dear prime minister, we can't just come here as we like. And if nothing else, it is precisely because the moral principles that we assist Her Majesty the Queen, after all there is that covenant. If you forget these, it would not be good, right?"

With his fingers tapping his head, Bugriser smiled.

The young prime minister at the same time was speechless. This time from the opposite seat came a sound.

"You should take care to talk less nonsense if that is the case."

The distinguished young man Dist • Ralgris suddenly stared at the burly man.

"We have no spare time to waste on unnecessary arguments. Whether it is me or you, nor this country either."

"Fuh"

Hearing Dist's words, Bugriser turned a deaf ear. When everything calmed down, the military conference resumed.

Currently at the New Kingdom, the Queen's relation with the nobles did not have a dominant position.

The Old Empire – now The New Kingdom, had a vast territory.

That itself was the problem, solidarity broke after the collapse of the long-ruling Old Empire, if the Four Great Noble Families were to disband, the system of rule over the territories would fall into anarchy.

Right now the New Kingdom's existence depends on the Four Great Noble Families.

"Now, how do we deal with the incoming Heiburg and the Old Empire rebel armies? We can't lend much troops to the kingdom, right? Right now the number of excellent Drag-Knight still isn't enough."

That's ..."

To Bugriser's words, the Queen was hesitate to speak.

If there was a clear solution, they wouldn't need to convene the Four Great Nobles.

Since the New Kingdom would conduct warfare against foreign enemies, it was necessary to allocate the majority of the Drag-Knight to the garrison.

Not only they had to deploy the military, according to intelligence reports, the strength of the rebel army was still beyond their expected figure.

Seeing the young Queen's speechless figure, the old Zagha spoke with his hoarse voice.

"—Then, how about using the students from the Imperial Academy, what do you think."

".....!?"

In an instant the atmosphere froze.

"Are you kidding, Sir Schultzed. You have the intention to just watch and sacrifice the students—“

Standing beside the Queen, the prime minister Nulph hastily raised objections.

"Oh no wait, I have also heard. Rumor said that, the Imperial Academy Knight squadron... 'Knights (Syvalles)' is a considerable fighting force."

"Beside, isn't there an excellent Drag-Knight that destroyed an Abyss appeared in the Citadel City. It's the only male student in the Academy—The sinner Lux Arcadia yes?"

"...."

Raffi and Nulph, who had heard the words, had a stiff look on their faces.

"Where exactly, have you heard this—“

"Aa, please do not misunderstand, I'm not trying to figure out what happened in the past. But I want to protect the country now. Don't you think so? Your Majesty the Queen."

After listening to Zagha's suggestive words, the burly man sitting next to him exposed a crooked smile "So that's it, it is pretty reasonable. That sinner did

appear on the battlefield against foreign enemy.”

“It’s just that, even more than his father, the previous Emperor, I heard that he’s good at attracting girls.....”

Seeing old man exposed vulgar smile, Raffi frowned.

“Then it’s troublesome. Because he is the sinner of the Old Empire, to intervene in the Imperial City——either militarily or politically, it will attract all sorts of gossip”

“Yes, thus ——a decision needs to be made. Your Majesty.”

At this moment, the silent Dist Ralgris abruptly interrupted.

“Because you are the one that let him live. If he were to have any connections with someone in this country’s center of power, it would be you. So the decision to let him subjugate the ‘Imperial Capital Recapture Plan’ along with the Knight Squadron can only be decided by you.”

“.....”

Raffi temporarily became silent, lost in thought.

The true identity of Lux Arcadia——the existence called ‘The Black Hero’, except for the Queen Raffi and the prime minister Nulph, as well as some additional other people outside, the four nobles didn’t know of this fact.

Although it was convenient to conceal Lux in the Citadel City ‘Knights(Syvalles)’, but from the world point of view, Lux was still the symbol of “Old Empire man”.

If he again involved with New Kingdom power central, it would attract a variety of incidents.

Not only the people, even the lords and those with power in the capital would move because of it.

However, right now the New Kingdoms needed to gather all its power to resist the ‘Imperial Capital Recapture Plan’.

These ideas, needless to say, could be understand.

“If you have made your decision, then please return to the city and send him

to me, the Schultzed house. After all, letting the sinner who is still a young man come to Your Majesty side is not really proper.”

Zaghao bent his mouth, revealing those wrinkles and said.

“Hou. You’re really an old fox, so narrowed minded. But giving the teenager to you, who knows what will become of it. How about we just let that sinner kid take care of the mess by himself.”

Bugriser was also scratching his head, showing his ten-parts enthusiasm with the idea.

The queen Raffi looked at their actions, could not help but leak a sigh.

“He can’t be hand over to any of you. I’m the one most suited to be responsible for this person.”

Known as the most honest man in the Four Great Nobles, Dist quietly gave his input.

The words of the man who would always step back during the usual military conference shocked the atmosphere in the room.

“Hm. What is your reason? Is it that you no longer satisfied with your big lord status governing a region, similarly want to grab the control power of the New Kingdom?”

“To prevent the ‘Imperial Capital Recapture Plan’, I intend to let my daughter help. I remember I’ve mentioned this the other day? I agreed to let the boy serve as a Citadel City ‘Knight’, and my daughter is one of his friends. Right now he is getting closer to the being a Drag-Knight, so through my daughter we can determine the proper treatment for him later on.”

“Well, there is some reason to it.....But, is that true? Although your daughter was known as the strongest non-commissioned officer in battle, but it is rumored that she is quite aversion to men.”

Zaghao temporarily nodded, but still voiced his doubts.

“If she had agreed to enter the academy “Knights” along with him, then my daughter must have also accepted him. On top of that, I do not remember teaching her to mix private feelings.”

"So that's it. Let your seductive daughter seduce the sinner, you are also a strategist who cannot be underestimated."

Facing Bugriser provocation, Dist did not respond.

For the lords who governed the vast territory of the New Kingdom, many of them have families living in the capital. They, and the government officials including the magistrates, had great connections within the New Kingdom.

Therefore, if each faction could leave merits and accomplishments in the New Kingdom, they would have the right to speak on both political and legal matters; they and their territories would also benefit.

Of course, the ones who knew this were not only the Four Great Noble Families.

Not anyone else, in the household of Queen Raffi were a large group of men with strong ambitions.

"Give me some time to think."

After a long silence, Raffi told them so.

As a result of this, the military conference was dissolved.

One by one those who gathered began to leave, only the oldest of them, the old man Zagha, stayed on the spot.

"Your Majesty, as an individual, I have a thing I want to confirm"

"What is it?"

Raffi steeled her nerves and asked.

Since the Old Empire, he had been lurking in the shadow, holding a personal intelligence network that warranted cautious against.

"Now, the ruin "Ark" is in the floating in the vicinity of Lies island, did you know?"

"....."

Hearing this, Raffi who was pretending to be calm slightly stiffened her face.

The information on the ruins was among the first-level confidential

information between the countries, even the Four Great Nobles were not privilege to know.

Nevertheless, for him to know the movement of the “Ark”, she couldn’t help but felt shaken.

“The Ark——how did you know?”

Muddy eyes flashed stopped at the reflexive respond in Raffi’s eye pupils.

As if to spy on her mind.

“It’s nothing, just a simple rumor only. Aa, just one more thing.....there is a problem. I happened to hear that Her Majesty’s family, the Marquis Dobar, a few day ago had taken his private armies to Lies Island ”How could he——impossible. He ought to be mobilizing for other things.....”

“If that is the case, this may be troublesome. The investigation right of the ruin held by our new kingdom Atismata had basically been exhausted in the last “Small Garden” investigation.....”

Zagha continued to confirm.

“If, the number of intrusion in the ruins increases, it is no longer just a matter of the country. Presumably Her Majesty the Queen do not want this kind of event happening——”

“Tonight’s military meeting is over. If there are other things, please find another time”

Prime Minister Nulph saw that the topic would continue, interrupted from the side.

“Please forgive my rudeness, then I will excuse myself.”

Carefully bowed his head, the old man left the room.

After completely could not sense Zagha’s breath, Nulph came near to Raffi’s side and whispered.

“Your Majesty, the Marquis Dobar’s matter——”

“I have not heard of it. But

At some point the “Ark” would be close to the island Lies. This was a top-

secret black site of the Old Empire.

Not confidential to other countries, even the important people of the Old Empire who knew the exact location and its circumstances were very few.

Moreover, the new kingdom's "Ark" location on waters from the island of Lies still had a considerable distance.

However, if Zagha's news was accurate, then how did Dobar knew the Ark would come, and just what was he scheming?

".....do you want dispatch a few secret agents to the Lies Island?"

"Get ready in the morning, though the coming events most likely cannot be stopped."

Nulph the prime minister confirmed, Raffi embarked on the city's red carpet.

Dobar Marquis was a distant relative of Raffi, moreover he had ambitions, not trust-worthy of use.

It was understandable that he had heard the news of the Ark.

However, Raffi noticed that another woman had sent the 'Knights' away to attend an out-of-school activity.

"I did not expect ——Relie, even you."

Raffi said to herself.

As dark clouds covered the moonlight over the city.

Episode 4 – Abyss's Awakening

Part 1

The world a few years ago.

Lux was looking back at the continuation of that.

The memory when he was a child. The continuation of the day when he helped Philuffy and they recognized each other as friends for the first time.

After that, it didn't take much time until the two of them became close with each other.

Because of the circumstances of Philuffy's father's work, until now she had never stayed for long in the same place, and Lux too didn't have someone the same age as him who he could open his heart to.

While Philuffy's father was staying in the capital because of the business conditions of that time, Lux was spending a long time with Philuffy inside and outside the imperial court. He also went to play at her house.

It was only a period of around two months, but for Lux who didn't have any friends until now, the happy time that was like a dream continued.

In the castle they explored various places that they could enter, because of that they got lost and later got scolded by their parents.

They made toys at a workshop outside the castle and presented it to each other, and explored the nearby vast forest.

Lux was treated to Philuffy's specialty cooking, which was hotcakes, and because Lux said that it was delicious Philuffy created a lot and it felt like his

stomach would burst.

When they were covered all over with mud on a rainy day, they entered a bath together.

Lux was used to seeing his little sister's naked body, but he still felt a bit embarrassed.

But, that happy every day life suddenly met its end.

The day Lux's grandfather Wade had an audience with the emperor.

Because he gave a strong counsel and tried to admonish the emperor, he earned the animosity of the emperor. Lux's grandfather was imprisoned due to the crime of defamation and Lux's family was also expelled from the imperial court.

What was waiting for Lux and the others who left the castle was the hatred and fury of the people who were oppressed by the empire.

The gazes of resentment that he felt when he went outside of the residence in the outskirts of the imperial capital.

Lux had never heard of anything that they said then, but even from afar he understood that they were talking maliciously about him.

When he was living in the imperial court, his nerves were worn out as an imperial family member who was the farthest from the throne's succession rights, but the conclusion was the worst.

Lux and his family who were recognized as the decorations of the imperial capital were only used as an example to serve as a warning.

Those who turned their blade to the emperor, the people whose will strayed from the imperial family, they would lose protection.

What would happen as a result to those who lose that protection? Lux tasted the resulting terror and repulsiveness keenly.

He also became unable to meet Philuffy that often.

Thinking back, Philuffy's father must have regarded it as dangerous to meet him openly.

Even so, the times when he was able to meet Philuffy, it would be just as in the past. It supported Lux very much.

And then—that day seven years ago.

Under the raining hill, that day the horse carriage that Lux and his mother were riding fell.

Lux asked for help. But the people that his grandfather tried to protect showered them with boos and rocks, they were watching his seriously wounded mother die without helping.

Even Lux who was still a child at that time logically understood why it turned out like that.

Other than a part of the nobility and the imperial family, nobody else knew what Lux's grandfather said to the emperor that caused him to get thrown into the prison.

The people resented the imperial family who was carrying out a tyrannical rule and lived in vice while tormenting them.

As the punishment for defying the emperor, the emperor deliberately sent Lux and his family to such an environment.

The horse carriage falling into a cliff at that time was only a tragic incident that came at that unfortunate time.

But, this was about his only mother.

Furthermore she was the only parent that protected Lux. For Lux who lost her, such logic didn't become any consolation for him.

His father the emperor, the imperial family, the factions—and even the people were his enemies.

Lux who was hit by the hatred and resentment from the surrounding felt something like dregs piling up day by day inside his chest.

「.....I don't want to meet you again, go home.」

After his mother's death, when her modest funeral service was over, Lux said that to Philuffy in front of his mother's grave.

He knew that he was just venting his anger to the wrong person.

However, because of the muddy black something whirling inside his chest, he was unable to look at his childhood friend's face like usual.

And then, if even Philluffy and her family changed how they looked at Lux then—

That thought was very much terrifying, that he couldn't help but distance Philluffy from himself.

「I'll, come again.」

「.....」

Lux pretended to not hear the small voice from behind him because of the rainfall.

But, somewhere inside his heart, his childish heart was hoping.

The imperial family, the nobles obeying them, and then the people too were the enemies of Lux's family.

Even so, perhaps only Philluffy would stay as his ally. He held such hope.

After that, a week passed.

But since that day, Philluffy had never visited Lux's residence again.

He thought that it couldn't be helped.

His family was already an existence that was shirked in the imperial capital.

If someone got close to his family, they might meet misfortune. There was no doubt that Philluffy's father also stopped her from coming.

Even though he understood that logically, it was painful.

That day Lux also came to the grave in front of the church.

He visited the grave once a day, but every time he came there always would be a single flower placed before the grave.

Thinking that it must be the priest who placed that flower, Lux felt saved just for a bit.

But, that day there wasn't any flower, when Lux returned to his residence, he heard the sound of the door being knocked.

「Lux-kun!? It's a disaster! Philuffy disappeared from home—」

Lux's mind turned white for a moment hearing Relie's words, and then, he noticed.

The one who brought flowers everyday to his mother's grave, was Philuffy.

According to Relie, Philuffy was forbidden from going to Lux's residence for a while by her father's order.

In the first place, there was a far distance from their mansion until this residence, they wouldn't be able to come without using a horse carriage.

But, Philuffy sneaked behind the backs of the servants and slipped out of the mansion, she walked through long distances and came until nearby Lux's residence.

Since then Philuffy came everyday to where Lux was.

When Lux split with Relie to search separately, he found Philuffy placing a flower in front of the grave of Lux's mother.

Her clothes was covered with mud everywhere, blood was flowing from her knee and forehead. Perhaps she had fallen down in the forest.

「Why.....?」

Hearing the words Lux squeezed out, Philuffy turned around and answered.

「I thought that if I came here, I can meet you.」

「Why did you sneak out and come here!? Even though I told you that I don't want to meet you anymore, why did you come everyday!? Even though, meeting someone like me who isn't wanted by anyone anymore, is meaningless—」

「Because, I'm a poor talker.」

When Lux yelled that with a sorrowful voice, Philuffy looked down with her usual expressionless face looking just a little sad, and muttered.

「I don't understand, what should I say to Lu-chan at this kind of time, but.....」

Philuffy was speaking while walking slowly under the rain towards him.

And then, she tightly embraced Lux's body, and whispered.

「Phi.....chan?」

「In the past, my dead Okaa-san told me. Do this, to your important person, she said.」

The sensation of cold skin that was exposed to rain.

Even so a faint warmth shook Lux's heart.

「Lu-chan, isn't alone.」

Lux's body began to tremble hearing the kindly whispered words.

He hugged back her body with a trembling hand. He raised his voice and continued to cry.

The tears that he had never let out even once since that day his mother died, the dam broke and it overflowed out.

Philuffy continued to gently pat Lux's back.

The hatred and resentment that filled Lux's chest until now felt like they all vanished just from that.

After that, the father who was beaten down by Philuffy's persistence attached Relie and servants and guards at her side to bring her to Lux's residence everyday.

A few days after that, it seemed that they would have to leave the capital because of work circumstances and the last day of the parting finally arrived.

「Really thank you, for everything. Phi-chan.」

Lux who had completely regained his footing was calm even in his parting with Philuffy.

He would be lying if he said that he wasn't lonely, but thanks to her he could keep on living from here on too.

He thought that he wouldn't lose sight of himself anymore.

On the other hand Philuffy was silent like usual, Lux was talking various things

with several adults including Relie and Dalt.

And then, when the time to part arrived, Lux yelled towards that back.

「That..... I'll absolutely create it! A country where even girls like Phi-chan can feel safe, I will create it! I swear that I'll absolutely change this empire! That's why—」

Lux looked down, his words got caught in his throat. Philuffy turned around towards such Lux.

And then, she slowly walked towards Lux, then she softly pressed her lips on Lux's lips.

「—Eh?」

The soft sensation touching his lips.

A sweet fragrance tickled his nasal cavity before it went away.

「Good luck charm. Onee-chan taught it to me. So that one day, we can meet again for sure, she said.」

「.....」

Lux couldn't make any words.

It wasn't just because of feeling embarrassed from getting kissed, he was completely in a daze from the lingering mysterious warmth filling his chest.

「Bye bye, Lu-chan.」

「Rig,ht.....」

The little bit of Philuffy's smile he saw at the end melted into Lux's memory and vanished.

And then—Lux woke up.

Part 2

The fourth day of the training camp.

Following their usual plan, after completing their individual training in the practice ground, they carried out the Ruin investigation once more.

「Airi-chan and I will come along today, too. This was originally a dangerous activity, so we'll try to not be much of a hindrance.」

Relie who was putting a bundle of ancient text in order consulted Celis and they decided today's unit composition.

Lux, Relie, Philuffy, and Tillfur, these four names would form a group and advanced forward.

「Philuffy, how is your condition?」

Lux asked Philuffy in consideration of her recent poor physical health and anemia.

「Yes. I'm okay.」

She gave a concise answer with her usual serious face.

「Tell me right away if your condition worsens. It's no good to force yourself you know?」

Lux felt some kind of unease while saying that.

It wasn't towards Philuffy, but regarding this situation.

But, he couldn't put into words about what was strange specifically. Everyone entered the Ark, with him unable to resolve that feeling.

Using what the Ruin's girl, La Cruche told them as reference, Airi highlighted the route until the control room area in the map and distributed it.

The turnaround point of the Ark that was divided into eleven level in

total—the sixth floor. They had already finished determining the safe route until that point.

Therefore, as long as they didn't encounter any Abyss, they should be able to reach until the control area with their fast pace but, 「Everyone. I've been waiting. It has been a long time.」

Everyone reached the sixth floor after marching for dozens of minutes. When they assembled there, La Cruche was waiting there following the prearranged place and time.

「Waaa, she is tiny and cute!」

「She looks like a doll doesn't she? Let me touch her too.」

「Aa, the, the ears are delicate so please don't touch them!」

The automaton La Cruche who looked like a little girl was surrounded by the girls who weren't wearing their armor in order to save energy.

「Will she be fine.....?」

「It's all right I think? I've told her beforehand to not say anything important.」

When Lux smiled wryly seeing what was going on, Krulcifer smoothly said so.

According to La Cruche, she would obey the command of Krulcifer who was a Xfer, so she was told to keep it a secret about their relationship—it appeared that La Cruche was following that order properly.

「But, there is one thing that concerns me.」

Krulcifer was watching over La Cruche from afar while she suddenly muttered that.

「Concern?」

「According to what she said, I am simply her supervisor, and above the supervisor it seems there is the existence of the LordCreator. A possessor of authority that surpasses mine—」

A figure that was even more important than her that was the Ruin's supervisor.

Lux couldn't imagine at all what kind of position such person had but, 「But,

that kind of person rarely exists isn't it?」

Krulcifer who was discovered inside a Ruin.

And then, thinking back about how La Krusche had never awakened until now inside the Ark, it should be fine to believe that the possibility of encountering the existence of a person with such high position was really low.

「Most likely the possibility is really low, but it's safer to not let her meet with anyone else other than us. Especially in a situation like this time.」

The investigation of an unknown Ruin where they didn't know what would happen.

In the case that a hostile opponent snatched the control of La Cruche, they didn't know what would happen.

「Krulcifer-samaaa! Then, let's depart immediately.」

La Cruche went towards Krulcifer after all the members were affectionate with her.

While they were marching, La Cruche would be entrusted to Krulcifer.

「Then, see you later. Be really careful okay?」

「Yes. Krulcifer-san too, be safe.」

They exchanged light words, and then they formed small groups once more under Celis's instruction.

When it was over, Relie walked to the front and talked lightly.

「The seventh floor ahead seems to be a place that is called as the manufacture area. According to the Drake's enemy search, it appears there is signs of the Abyss there. They aren't moving, but their number is quite a lot.」

「.....」

Hearing those words, everyone present tensed their loosened expressions.

「So that we won't get discovered by the Abyss and aimed from the surroundings, we will circle around the center and advance through the corridor route. Everyone, be careful okay?」

「Yes!」

After everyone replied, they began advancing.

When they advanced through the seventh floor, the passage immediately branched into five paths.

There was the main center route that was blocked by a sturdy door, and four other small corridors.

Lux and company planned to split into four groups and march in the four corridors.

There was no doubt that all the paths would lead to in front of the stairs towards the eighth floor, but although the center route had the shortest distance, it was spacious and there were a lot of the Abyss signs detected from there.

Therefore, they chose the detouring route that was the four corridors other than the center path.

Lux's group advanced through the corridor at the very left.

Lux and Tillfur were clad in their Drag-Rides and protected Relie, while Philuffy was saving her energy and walked on her own feet.

Even so if everything went according to the plan, they should be able to reach the ninth floor within today.

「Even so, we almost haven't seen any Abyss in this Ruin isn't it? No, it's better if we don't meet any but, somehow, it feels unnatural.」

Tillfur muttered while walking at the lead.

「Certainly.....」

Just because they were inside a Ruin didn't mean that they would encounter the Abyss for sure, even so, although they had moved for quite a long distance in this exploration, they had only encountered the Abyss two times until now.

Was that just a coincidence, or perhaps something else—

『Everyone. We will soon pass through the side of the center main street. Please be quiet so as to not awaken the Abyss.』

Noct's dragon voice that suddenly came into hearing tensed Lux.

The wall of the corridor Lux and company were passing through became glass on the right side. They could look down at the center route from there.

The glass was different from the glass Lux and the others normally saw, it seemed to be made from a solid material that was unique for a Ruin but—

「.....Lux-chi. That's, could it be」

Tillfur looked down towards the center route and she gulped.

「Yeah.....」

In the large hall spreading at the other side, there were countless things that looked like giant bottles lining up.

Inside them was crowded with grotesque figures they had never seen before.

Inside the transparent bottles, were Abyss immersed in liquid of various colors. They couldn't see whether the Abyss were conscious or not from where they were.

But, even just from a simple estimation, the number of the bottles was a few hundred.

If by any chance all of the Abysses awakened all at once, even if it was Lux and the others they wouldn't stand a chance.

「Manufacture area.....could it mean, that they were manufacturing the Abyss?」

Relie nodded toward Tillfur who was raising a cramped voice.

「Looks like it. From the start it had been speculated that something like that exists somewhere inside the Ruin though, most likely the Abyss manufactured here will appear inside the Ruin or in the surrounding area.」

「By that you mean, all of those are actually alive! Please stop saying that!」

Relie smiled wryly seeing Tillfur's body shaking along with the Wyrm she was wearing.

「Then, let's get through this place quickly without delay.」

They were going to resume their march further while talking like that, it was then, 「Wait.」

Philuffy who was walking quietly until now lifted up her absentminded face and spoke.

「Something is—coming.」

- GASHIIIN!*

Right after that, a loud and heavy metallic sound resounded from behind Lux and others.

At the same time, the lighting illuminating the corridor with bluish white light instantly flickered and switched color to red, piercing warning sounds could be heard.

「This is.....!」

「Wai-, what happened!? We didn't really do any—!」

When Lux and Tillfur raised a bewildered voice,

- GUooOoOOON!*

Such heavy bass roar passed through the corridor and entered their ears.

It was the existence of a powerful Abyss that they felt for the first time since coming here.

They felt that dreadful killing intent from the other side of the long and narrow corridor, and then, 「Be careful.」

Philuffy whispered and pulled out her knife-shaped Sword Device.

The moment Relie reflexively withdrew behind, a gust blew from the front.

「GURURURUGAAAaAAAAA-!」

「Kuuh.....!?」

Tillfur blocked the coming high speed flying attack with the battle axe of her Wyrm and she was blown away.

The large body that could only barely be seen didn't pause and rushed forward. When it circled to the back of Lux and the others, it twisted its body and accelerated once more.

When a front leg that was thick like a log attacked, Lux's Wyvern blocked it using its blade.

「Lux-chi! Thank you!!？」

Tillfur leaked out a relieved voice for a moment, but she then held her breath when the true identity of the attacker became clear.

It was a gigantic dog.

No, it was too halfhearted to call that shape as a dog. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it a monster.

It was as though it was outside the categorization of animals, a grotesque huge body that easily surpassed a house.

Violet fur that was nearly black, pointed eyes and sharp pupil that were laced with madness.

Inside its mouth was packed full with knife-like sharp fangs without any gap.

And then above all else, it had two heads, seven snakes were growing on its back, they were crawling around.

Its size took the space of more than half of the corridor's width, regardless of that it was abnormally agile.

And then, it possessed terrific strength just as its appearance suggested.

「Ku, u.....」

The giant dog put its strength to smash the blade stopping it, but Lux somehow parried the attack and dodged.

After that the mad dog's figure vanished deeper into the dim corridor—into the darkness once more.

It wasn't running away. Piercing sharp killing intent was still directed towards

Lux's group of four.

「Wha, what's that.....!? It's something I've never seen at the academy's Abyss picture book. In the first place, just what is going on!?」

Tillfur couldn't hide her agitation and yelled. Relie whispered with her face also looking tense.

「Someone wrenched open the gate of the center route and infiltrated the manufacture area..... The possibility is high that this Abyss appeared in response to that.」

Most likely that manufacture area had great importance even among all the mechanisms in this Ruin.

Most likely because there was someone who infiltrated that place, the defense mechanism activated.

「GUAAAaAAaAaaaaAH!」

When the mad dog Abyss growled once more, Lux leaped forward.

「Howling Roar!」

It was the basic technique of a Drag-Ride, the howl of a Drag-Ride that deployed a vortex of shockwave.

Originally it only possessed the strength that could only frighten the enemy, but in this cramped corridor that was only a straight line, it was able to definitely stop the enemy's momentum.

But—

「Lux-chi, be careful! It's not faltering at all!」

Tillfur whose gaze was focused at the darkness further ahead readied her battle axe while covering the other two behind her.

Immediately after, the wall of shockwave was easily pierced through, and the mad dog Abyss came attacking.

「-.....!」

- GIIN*, a piercing sound stabbed the eardrum.

The front leg attack the Abyss unleashed once more was blocked by Lux's blade, at the same time *crack*, a crack entered that huge claw.

Critical hit.

The Scale Blade that Lisha created—a sword that had a barrier running along its blade, by using that, it was possible to force back the enemy's attack if the user moved with unparalleled accurate timing and positioning. It was Lux's special move when he was using his Wyvern.

By focusing the opponent's strength into one point and returning it back, it became a counter that brought about destruction.

Lux use of Howling Roar wasn't to give the enemy damage, it was to limit the offensive option of the enemy.

「GU, ooOOH!」

Even though Lux couldn't defeat it with his attack just now, but it seemed that the Abyss was at least damaged. The mad dog leaped backwards and then turned around.

And then it hid its body inside the darkness once more and this time even its presence vanished.

「Haaa, that was scary.....」

A few second after the threat left, Tillfur exhaled out deeply.

「Just what in the world was that.....」

Even Lux was still agitated.

That he could use Critical Hit in a large part was because this area of the corridor was narrow, so the direction of enemy's attack was greatly limited from one direction.

He would need some more time until he was able to see through the enemy's movement and matched the timing perfectly.

For the time being, he confirmed that Relie and Philuffy were safe. And then when he was being vigilant of his surroundings once more, 『Lux-kun, can you hear me?』

A dragon voice from Krulcifer that was exclusively sent to Lux came in.

「A large dog Abyss came out, but everyone here is safe! What about Krulcifer-san and the others!?」

When Lux replied like that, Krulcifer let out a faintly relieved sigh, then she talked with a voice that was tinged with tension once more.

『That Abyss is most likely Orthrus. According to La Cruche, when the Ark entered the alert state, three of that Abyss will be released. The first will target the one that caused the alert, the second will patrol inside the ship, and then the third will go outside the ship and attack the surroundings. They are the Ark's watchdogs. It seems that they are quite strong even among the Abyss.』

「.....」

『I'll give you the message from La Cruche. This warning sound is coming from quite far in the back, it seems that it was because someone wrenched open the door of the manufacture area.』

「Just who was—」

『If the door was opened because the Ruin confirmed someone to be related to the Ruin like me, it wouldn't become like this. The one who forcefully opened the door was most likely—the group of that Marquis Dobar. This is their work.』

「But if I remember right, they should be several floors above—」

『Yes, I don't know how they caught up to us but..... They've arrived until the beginning of this seventh floor, at the bow area. And then right now they are planning to break through the shortest center route in order to overtake us.』

「But, if they do that.....!」

They would be rushing through the very center of the Atelier that was manufacturing the Abyss.

Surely there was no way that all the Abyss inside those bottles would start moving all at once, but it would still be extremely dangerous.

『Yes, it's possible that they will get surrounded by the Abyss and get killed. But, we can only ask the headmaster and Celis-senpai to make decision of what we are going to do now.』

「Yeah.....」

After the communication with Krulcifer was cut, Lux hurriedly reported the information he heard to Relie and the others.

Marquis Dobar's private force suddenly raised their marching speed, and there was a high possibility that they would catch up.

As a result of wrenching open the door in their attempt to break through the manufacture area, this alarm sounded and three powerful Abyss appeared.

Marquis Dobar's force was also in danger.

Relie who heard all that information hesitated slightly.

「It can't be helped. Let's hurry ahead.」

Relie brushed up her hair and declared that.

「.....Eh?」

「From the start we had talked about this with them. That we will investigate this Ark at our own risk. Besides we are already half-way through this seventh floor corridor. If the Abyss came out in response to this alarm, then we won't make it in time even if we turn around.」

「.....」

The corridor route Lux's group was in didn't have a direct connection with the center route of the manufacture area.

If they tried to return until the seventh floor entrance from here, it would take several minutes even with the top speed.

Besides, in the case that a swarm of the Abyss appeared inside, if Dobar's group attempted a forceful breakthrough, then they would simply miss Lux and others, and not only that Lux's group that headed out to save them would instead become surrounded by the many Abyss that appeared to chase after Dobar's group.

If they assumed such a worst case scenario, then it would be the safest to reach the control room area at the tenth floor below.

But,

(Is that okay? Is it really—)

「Come..... Typhon」

That moment Lux was pondering, the Divine Drag-Ride Typhon was summoned in front of Philuffy.

「Philuffy?」

When Lux turned towards the direction of the voice, Philuffy's body was clad in armor.

「I think, that it's better if Lu-chan and I return to the surface, for the moment.」

And then, she continued with her usual calm voice.

「Because perhaps right now, that Abyss is going outside the Ark too.」

Philuffy muttered while sending her gaze towards the reinforced glass along the wall.

According to La Cruche's explanation that he heard from Krulcifer, certainly it was said that one of three watchdogs would head outside the Ark.

Currently there was almost no military Drag-Knights on Ries Island.

「I understand.....」

Hearing her little sister's words, Relie looked down with a face that looked worried and then she gave a new instruction.

「Lux-kun. Can you pursue that Abyss together with Philuffy? Everyone else will hurry to reach the eighth floor while no Abyss is pursuing.」

「Yes! But, headmaster is」

「Ah, it's fine about that. There was contact from Noct just now, it seems like the group of Celis-senpai that reached the eighth floor earlier will hurry to come here so—. Until they come, I can hold out here even alone!」

Tillfur readied her armament, the battle axe and showed a confident smile.

Her body was still shaking a bit, but she was encouraging herself as a member of Syvalles.

「Just as I was taught, it'll be fine if I move after calmly looking at the opponent's movements, ain't it, sensei?」

Tillfur recited Lux's teaching that he gave her when giving personal guidance in the practice ground.

Lux's expression loosened seeing the girl's enthusiasm and he nodded.

「Yes. If it's Tillfur, you can do it. —That's why, do your best.」

「Ro-ger, instructor-sama.」

After exchanging salutes with Tillfur, Lux turned towards Philuffy.

「Philuffy, is your body all right?」

「.....Yes. I can go.」

Philuffy responded with her usual serious face.

It was hard to notice inside the corridor that was lighted by red light, but Philuffy's condition looked worse than before.

Her cheeks were slightly red, and her breathing was rough.

Above all else, her reaction when the Abyss attacked just now was unthinkably slow compared to her usual movement.

When Lux ruminated about those facts and hesitated, Philuffy took a deep breath.

「Let's hurry. If we have to search for the Abyss that headed outside, it would be too late if we don't split.」

「.....Got it. Let's go.」

The safety of the islanders was the foremost.

Lux accepted Philuffy's will and he pulled out his other Sword Device.

「—Manifest, the violent dragon that devours the gods' flesh and blood. Sever the sky of dark clouds, Bahamut!」

Lux pushed the button on the grip together with the Passcode, and summoned a jet black Divine Drag-Ride.

That huge dragon that possessed a streamlined shape quickly covered Lux's

body and changed into armor.

And then, he flew glidingly through the corridor that was still filled with ominous alarm sounds.

When fighting an Abyss that he had never seen before, normally Lux would first use the Wyvern that was specialized for defense.

Bahamut's Divine Raiment was the ability of compression strengthening—Reload on FireViolent Eater.

In the first five seconds, one's own time would be decelerated by several times over, and then in the next five seconds the flow of time would be accelerated until several times over. Using that special ability, Lux could use Quick Shot that would instantly destroy the opponent's mobile parts, but to perform that attack it was necessary for Lux to be able to see through the enemy attack's preliminary movement with great precision.

In order to see through the attack, Lux needed to confirm and learn the enemy's behavior through many exchanges of offense and defense. Wyvern was effective as the preparatory steps for that, but as expected this time there was no time for that.

In order to pursue the Abyss heading outside of the ship from the seventh floor, the flying speed of a Wyvern was undependable, and above all else Lux was impatient.

(I also don't want Philuffy forcing herself, if I don't protect everyone on the island.....!) For that too he had to defeat the Abyss without wasting time. Lux glanced briefly at Philuffy who was following behind using her Typhon, and then he accelerated Bahamut even further.

「This is..... bad!」

Lux noticed a certain fact after he passed through the seventh floor and continued to retrace their steps from the sixth floor until the first floor.

With Bahamut's top speed, even that Orthros could be pursued. But he couldn't use that much speed in order to avoid the obstacles inside the Ark.

And perhaps because of the alert state of the Ruin, bulkheads appeared in a

part of the route and blocked Lux's path. Because of that he lacked behind the Abyss.

He finally reached until the portal of the Ark, but he had to wait several second until the transfer to outside started.

(If the Abyss gets outside the Ark like this, then everyone, the people of the island will—!) 「It's fine, Lu-chan.」

When Lux was losing the presence of his mind, Philuffy drove Typhon to his side and talked to him.

「But.....!」

「That Abyss still hasn't gone outside. I know from its presence.....」

「.....Philuffy?」

A suspicious presence and an empty tone.

Lux's back became slightly cold seeing Philuffy's atmosphere that he had seen before.

The alarm sound that felt unpleasant to the ear he was hearing inside the Ark.

In the beginning he didn't notice, but it felt like he had certainly heard it somewhere before several times—.

「Say, Phi-chan.」

Anxiety was suddenly born inside Lux's chest. It was an awkward time until the transfer began.

It caused Lux to speak out the question that he was unable to say until now.

「Have you ever, come to this island, before.....?」

「.....」

There was no light in Philuffy's eyes.

She didn't even react to Lux's question.

It was as though she was already unable to hear anything right from the start.

「.....」

His throat was dry.

It felt suffocating, an indescribable uneasiness stabbed his chest.

Lux was going to try calling out once more, but it was then the pattern beneath them shined faintly. A pillar of light enveloped the two of them.

Gravity vanished from beneath them. Right after that a mysterious sensation, 「GURUaaaAAAAA.....！」

They could see the form of Orthrus jumping towards the island from the edge of the deck along with a loud howl.

It was the Abyss that had one of its claws cracked by Lux's Critical hit.

One of its heads glanced towards where Lux and Philuffy were, and right after that it ran inside the forest at high speed.

「Damn it! At this rate—」

The Abyss was already heading inside the island.

The only silver lining was that it wasn't going toward the residential area, but they would lose sight of it if it entered deep inside the forest.

Lux was about to fly Bahamut to quickly pursue it, it was then,

「Lu-chan. Tell me the location of the Abyss while you pursue it.」

Philuffy who was skating behind spoke to Lux with a calm voice.

「That's—, could it be?」

Lux guessed her intention just from that.

「Yes. If you stop its movement for me just for a moment, I can catch it.」

「Got it.....」

There was no time for hesitation.

Lux raised Bahamut's speed and pursued the Orthrus that was changing its route irregularly in order to shake him off.

The Abyss wasn't counterattacking right away must be because it was trying

to camouflage its figure by hiding inside the forest.

Its aim was to make Lux worry that he would lose sight of it and make his motions simple.

(But, I'll let it escape if I hesitate because I'm scared to take the bait.....!) Lux resolved himself and tried to raise Bahamut's speed even further, it was then—

「Lu-chan. It's fine. We aren't that weak you know?」

「.....Thank you, Philuffy.」

Hearing Philuffy's voice, Lux recovered his composure.

He took a deep breath and accelerated Bahamut further.

He reached the position right above the Orthrus that was dashing agilely inside the forest and he gradually shrank the distance.

「Gu, urururururu.....!」

Even Lux could hear its ferocious voice that was mixed with the sound of grinding teeth.

It must be irritated towards Lux that was sticking close to it without choosing to attack forcefully.

But, Orthrus was gradually approaching the practice ground.

And then when it came out of the forest, the strategic moment came.

「Howling Howl!」

The practice ground was surrounded with bulky stone walls, there was a single path that connected its entrance with the forest.

Lux struck with the impact of Holwing Howl in that place where there was no obstacle at all.

But,

「GU, RURURUaAA.....!」

That instant, Orthrus's eye glint shined and it accelerated even faster.

It dodged the Howling Howl's shockwave and slipped through the gate of the practice ground.

「.....!？」

A moment later, Typhon's Divine Armament, the wire of Pile AnchorDragon Bite Binding Chain cut through the air.

Their coordination failed.

The Orthrus that saw a good chance filled its four limbs with strength and leaped towards Lux above who was showing an opening, it was then—

「That was perfect, Lu-chan.」

Something unusual happened at the same time as Philuffy's slow voice.

「GA, GAH.....!？」

The leg of Orthrus that should have avoided the attack completely was snapped by the tip of the wire that was modeled after a snake's jaw.

Looking there, there was phosphorescence twinkling around Lux, flickering like flames.

Linker PulseResonance Wave.

It was the special armament loaded inside Bahamut. It formed a force field in the surroundings with a power to generate some amount of attraction or repulsion force.

By using that, the trajectory of the Pile Anchor that should be cutting empty air was adjusted and captured the prey. It was a two-stage trap.

A coordination that made use of Lux and Philuffy's special armaments.

「GURU.....AaaaAAH！」



While the mad dog growled and struggled, an anchor rolled it up at high speed and pulled it towards Typhon.

「.....ei」

Philuffy who pulled the Abyss up until the outer wall of the practice ground unfastened the entangling wire, and at the same time her fist punched the Abyss flying with a wide swing.

「GUGAaAAH!？」

The Orthrus that was blown away towards a direction where there was no signs of people started running again after it fell.

Chasing after it, Philuffy also jumped down the outer wall.

「Yosh!」

Next Lux also chased after the Orthrus.

But, he noticed something in the middle of doing that.

「This place, if I'm not mistaken—!？」

Lux followed Philuffy and the Orthrus into the abandoned monastery.

A part of the floor of the moldy building was broken, exposing an underground room and path below.

「Uu, kuh.....!」

Lux who kept floating above that ruined building, felt a sharp pain behind his eyes and he held his forehead.

The scenery below him shook fiercely and a memory of the past overlapped his sight.

(What.....is this!? This sensation—)

His five senses remembered it along with a strong stimulus.

The blackness of dried blood, and the rotten smell filling the air.

The echo of screams that couldn't be made out as a voice anymore.

Black remains with skin and hair clinging on it.

The disposal place for things that used to be human.

Lux desperately moved his gaze that was shaken by despair to the surrounding, searching for 『that』.

And then,

「—U, AAAAaAAAAH!」

Lux raised a yell from the sharp pain in his chest and breathed roughly.

「There is no way.....that's true!」

He remembered.

The day of the coup d'etat five years ago.

A few days before that day, Lux came to this place.

His childhood friend Philuffy was brought here to be a test subject for medicine. Hearing that, he located this place and came to save her.

What he found inside, was dead young girls that looked as though they were devoured apart from inside.

Human experimentation for developing a new weapon that was carried out in the era of the Old Empire.

This facility was built as a monastery on the surface. Below it the true tragedy was ensuing.

After the success of the revolution, this facility was abandoned and the corpses of the girls were given burial, but the traces in this place still remained the same as in the past.

(—But, that time. Philuffy wasn't here.....)

A while after the coup d'etat succeeded, he got a letter from Relie which told him that Philuffy was safe.

That was why, he must have luckily saved Philuffy.

Everything was just Lux's absurd fear, there wasn't anything wrong.

It should be so.

Even though there should be nothing more than that.

OOOoooOOO.....!

Orthrus's growl was echoing strangely and reached Lux's ears.

Lux who came back to his senses landed down in a large room in the underground facility. The dark shadow suddenly wavered.

「GUSHAAAAAH.....！」

Lux received the claw attack that stabbed at him in high speed and parried it.

Then, the mad dog didn't stop moving and immediately rushed through Lux and hid itself.

「-.....！」

Lux was spontaneously shocked when he saw its figure just for a moment.

Orthrus's shape changed.

There were dark red veins running through its whole body, its cloudy jet black pupils were shining gold.

And then above all else, the claw that Lux broke with Critical hit was completely regenerated.

「That's, it's the same as the Chimera Celis-senpai saw, and the Poseidon—」

Revival from a state of near death into a shape that achieved flesh regeneration and strengthening.

It felt like the enemy's movement that he was in the process of learning until just now was reset.

At present, when it was difficult to see through the enemy attack's preliminary motion, it was extremely dangerous to use Reload on Fire, but, 「SHAAAAAAAHH！」

The mad dog's violent attack that assaulted from the darkness once more was blocked by Lux from the front.

Orthrus's fang attacked at Bahamut's armor. At that moment its left eye was slashed.

「GU, GAAH.....!」

One of the three hidden techniques Lux invented at the end of his training—Quick DrawGodspeed Control.

Lux aimed at the eyeball because he saw it difficult to deal a lethal wound to the body of Orthrus that was in a rampaging state.

Orthrus's expression distorted in anguish. It tried to leap back, but its jump ended incompletely.

「GU, GA.....?」

The flash of Quick Draw that Lux unleashed once more severed the tip part of its front leg this time.

Orthrus that confirmed what happened raged and the countless snakes growing on its back squirmed.

「GUAAaAAAAAaAAA!」

It attacked not using its front leg or its fang, but the countless snake head that attacked simultaneously.

Judging that it couldn't win by defending and attacking one by one, it increased its number of attacks to the maximum and launched simultaneous attacks.

But—

「Reload on Fire.」

Super high speed instantaneous attacks using Bahamut's Divine Raiment.

Red slashing line that created a total of twelve lines ran through Orthrus's whole body instantly. Right after that, its body fell into pieces.

The mad dog that was severed apart until its core became black ash and crumbled.

It welcomed the same end like the Chimera and Poseidon before and scattered apart.

「Fuu.....」

Lux who finished defeating the Abyss dispelled Bahamut for the moment.

In the first place Bahamut's fuel consumption was really bad even among the Divine Drag-Rides that already had a severe consumption rate. Even though it was Lux but it was really hard to use Bahamut consecutively.

After he met up with Philuffy, he would use Wyvern to return back. And so he was going to search for her, it was then—

「Philu, ffy.....?」

He noticed that Philuffy herself wasn't anywhere he could see.

But, he could hear a frail, faint breathing sound from the other side of a broken wall.

In that instant, a strange sight surfaced at the back of Lux's mind, and he could hear a voice.

A certain day five years ago, a few days before the coup d'etat.

Relie Aingram visited him at the outskirt residence he was living in.

Her face was haggard and lethargic, her eyes became red from weeping her eyes out.

And then, her lips that were forcing out a smile silently opened.

「I want Lux-kun to also attend that girl's funeral. She surely, will feel happy. Xxxxx too—」

「—U, AAAAAH.....!」

An intense headache attacked Lux and he crouched on the spot.

Strange disordered memory.

Lux shook his head in denial to shake off that memory.

「There's no way that's true.....! Philuffy should have been saved that time!」

That day five years ago, when Lux searched for Philuffy here, she wasn't here.

After that a letter from Relie came telling him that Philuffy was safe.

(Then, what's this? This strange painful memory.....? I certainly—)

「Haa, haa.....」

A rough breathing voice pulled Lux's consciousness back to reality.

He suddenly could hear a girl's voice from the corner of the large room.

「Philuffy!」

Lux hurriedly ran towards the direction of the voice. There Philuffy was leaning on the wall and sat as though she was sinking down on the floor.

She wasn't injured.

Lux who was thinking about the worst case let out a relieved sigh and walked towards her.

Most likely she forced her anemic and feverish body and she reached her limit.

「Get a hold of yourself. I'll carry you to the boardinghouse right away, that's why—」

「Lu.....chan?」

Lux was slowly walking towards Philuffy to lend her his shoulder so she could stand. But then Philuffy opened her eyes slightly.

「Are you okay!? You are really feverish—」

Philuffy silently lifted up her face beside the hurrying Lux.

「Don't. Nearby, an Abyss is.....」

And then, she deliriously whispered with an emotionless voice.

「It's okay. If it's the Orthrus, I defeated it already. That's why don't worry—」

「No, it's here.」

「Eh.....?」

Lux was unable to say his next word.

His neck was grabbed far faster than he could speak and he was lifted up high.

「Wha—!？」

Both his feet left the floor. Lux was flustered.

His neck was strangled by Philuffy's right hand. At the same time he was hanging in midair.

It took Lux several seconds until he realized his situation.

「U.....guh! Philu, ffy.....?」

The moment Lux questioned with an anguished expression, he saw it.

Faint red patterns entered Philuffy's skin, both her eyes were dyed black.

Her pupils shined gold, a smile was pasted on her mouth.

「.....-!？」

The girl's smile was infected with madness that he had never seen from her even once until now.

Seeing the completely changed Philuffy, several images of the Abyss emerged inside Lux's brain.

Chimera, Poseidon, Orthrus.

The form transformation all those Abyss displayed.

However, why?

Why was something like that, in Philuffy—

「Ka, ha.....!」

His breathing and blood flow stopped, and his consciousness became distant.

Right after Lux resolved himself for death, Philuffy's hand suddenly let go.

「Gehoh.....! Kohah.....!」

Lux was breathing roughly on the stone paving he was thrown at.



Before his eyes, Philuffy's eyes closed and she abruptly collapsed face down.

The strange dark red pattern emerging on her skin was vanishing.

Seeing that, Lux approached Philuffy once more.

「Oh, oh-hoh. Are you two in the middle of having fun? My bad for being a nuisance here.」

「.....!?」

A scornful laugh came from the large room of the underground facility.

At the same time a small statured shadow wearing a jet black robe showed up in that place.

「You.....!」

Silver hair that was the same as Lux, and gray and blue eyes.

The girl who possessed an asymmetrical pair of eyes was standing there.

The arms dealer of darkness that was secretly maneuvering by selling weapons and information in various places.

Previously, this girl named Hayes she showed her face when the Academy was assaulted and introduced herself as Heiburg's strategist.

「Why are you here!?」

Lux pulled out the Sword Device of Bahamut while yelling at the same time.

「Don't scream like that prince, I'm getting cold feet here.」

In contrast Hayes showed a sticky smile while sitting on a table and crossed her legs.

「.....That Abyss too, was it your doing?」

The enemy didn't seem like she would take a fighting stance, but Lux didn't bother with it and closed the distance.

He reached a distance where his blade could reach in a single breath, faster

than a Drag-Ride could be summoned.

But, Hayes didn't look perturbed at all. She lifted her face in enjoyment.

「.....Ku-ku-ku. Just when I thought that you were just a brat enjoying the harem life with those sluts, but you bastard is actually one cruel guy huh. You're planning to let your lifesaver die? I'm referring to your childhood friend croaking there you know.」

Ahead of her gaze was the collapsed figure of Philuffy.

「What.....do you mean?」

A shadow entered Lux's face.

Somewhere in his heart, he had suspected the answer.

「RatatoskrParasitic Plant.」

The mouth of the sitting down Hayes distorted into a repulsive arc.

「The woman behind you has a part of a Ragnarok's body that I implanted into her—a seed of the Yggdrasil you see.」

「——」

「That woman's body is already half assimilated with an Abyss, turning into a part of Yggdrasil.」

Like that, she told the answer.

The fact that Lux feared and wanted to deny the most.

「Her heart is assimilated with an Abyss's core. She'll die if you try to remove it forcibly. Usually the seed is just sleeping inside that woman, but sometimes it will appear because of the danger to her life and abnormal agitation of the mind. It basically shows up as abilities the same as what you've seen until now.」

Abnormal super recovery and the improvement of body functions.

But, when the life energy was used up because of the abnormal consumption rate, the Abyss with those abilities would become black ash and crumble at that time.

「And then your childhood friend cannot go against 『Yggdrasil』, my Ragnarok

that is the master of that ovule seed. Usually she is no different at all from a normal human, but the parasite target that receives the sound wave commands Yggdrasil emitted would be instinctually urged to carry out that command. If the parasite target goes against that command, they will be tormented with high fever and headaches, and their body function will start to go out of order. It's at the level that it'll be hard even to just stand up straight.]

「Don't tell me—」

Lux shuddered hearing that explanation.

「Yes, that woman has been opposing the order Yggdrasil gave all this time. Kill Lux Arcadia. She had been obstinately refusing that command, and inside the pain that feels like hell, she was finally at her limit just now in this place.」

Hayes cackled while jumping down from the table.

That moment Lux thrust the tip of his blade toward her throat.

「Stop that command. If you don't—」

「Oi oi, calm down okay, prince.」

Hayes wasn't perturbed at all. She raised both her hands and played the fool.

「You at least already understand the reason why I appeared in front of you like this right? It's too late even if you kill me now. —No, instead it will be a disaster if you kill me or something. No one will be able to control Yggdrasil if I'm gone, and the last order given to it won't be revoked for eternity. You trash, pull away this rude sword right away. Or I'll kill that monster woman.」

Hayes fiddled with the horn flute in her hand, both her eyes opened and she sneered.

Unable to oppose her, Lux gritted his teeth while withdrawing the sword.

「.....Now, calm down and listen to me. That woman doesn't have long. The reason is because she has committed the greatest taboo for a parasite body of a Ragnarok.」

「Taboo you say.....?」

Hearing Hayes's completely unexpected words, Lux responded by parroting

her words.

「That's right. The greatest taboo for Yggdrasil's parasite body isn't going against an order, it's attacking another parasite body. That woman attacked an Abyss with a parasite inside its body just now. She tried to kill it.」

The body of Orthrus that turned into ash and vanished just now.

Most likely before Lux went into the underground facility, Philuffy cornered the Abyss until near death once already.

Therefore, it became the greatest rebellion against the controller of the parasite body, Yggdrasil, and her body reached the limit.

「What a sad reality. That woman is basically beyond help. She will die for sure within a few days. Just like the Abyss with a parasite body inside it that you guys killed, she will turn into a pitch black ash.」

Hayes declared indifferently.

Lux's heart rapidly chilled hearing that.

Lux understood not logically, but instinctually that what she was telling him was the truth.

「You understand what I'm telling you? Then, let's get to the main point.」

「What do you, mean?」

Lux whose eyes expression was shadowed asked with a dark voice.

「You are really slow huh, prince. Has even the screws in your head gone loose because of the shock from your cute childhood friend's condition? Do you think that this me intentionally showed up here just to harass you?」

「.....」

「This is a transaction. I'll especially give the order to Yggdrasil to save that woman. If you open the door at the deepest level of that Ruin—the Ark that you guys are sneakily searching.」

「.....What does that mean?」

「To open the door at the deepest part of every Ruin, the authentication of XferKey's Supervisor is needed see. I also have one Xfer, but unfortunately after

they use their authority once, they won't be able to use it again for a few months. If possible I want to have the Xfer with you, that woman with blue hair, to open the door.]

The Xfer that Hayes was talking about must be Krulcifer.

From the beginning of the investigation this time the objective was to reach the deepest level of the Ruin, so that condition could be achieved without any problem.

However—

「.....What is your objective? What are you planning as the strategist of Heiburg? Can you guarantee that Philuffy can be saved by doing that?」

Even so, he couldn't imagine at all that this wicked girl would fulfill her promise.

Hayes let out a thin smile at Lux's question and she threatened.

「Hee, I'm shocked. You bastard still don't understand your position even at this point, huh.」

And then, she made an evil look and her face came near Lux.

「You didn't have any choice right from the start. If you want to let that woman die then do whatever you like, you hero pretender false prince.」

Hayes said only that before she wore her hood low over her eyes again and turned around.

「I'll confirm whether you did your task by confirming whether the room at the deepest part is opened or not. You don't got much time left y'know. Finish your investigation in two days. About the time—let's see. Open it in the afternoon when my eyes can follow your group's movements. Even if you open the door when I'm not here, it will be closed from inside so there won't be any meaning doing that.」

「Wait! Hayes!」

Lux yelled towards Hayes who turned her back at him and walked away.

Her steps stopped, and she turned around with a fearless smile.

「Who are you? Those eyes and hair color, they are the same as the Old Empire's Arcadia family. Are you a survivor of the imperial family that I don't know about? Or else—」

「Hah」

Hayes laughed off Lux's question.

「I'm troubled if you're misunderstanding. I'm the real thing, different from you all.」

She only said that before her robed figure vanished ahead of the passage.

After that only Lux and Philuffy were left behind.

Part 3

「Haa..... ha! Somehow we defated it..... It's really a troublesome opponent.」

「Anyway, looks like this place is settled.」

Inside the Ark, near the center of the seventh floor.

Inside one of the four passages around the main route, Lisha and Krulcifer took a breather.

In front of them was the remains of the Orthrus that had its core broken already and died.

The two of them somehow managed to repel one of the three watchdogs that appeared simultaneously inside the Ark.

They didn't know how it worked, but the alarm resounding inside the ship had also stopped.

Right after Lux and Philuffy chased after an Orthrus outside the ship, all the members inside joined up together. It was then that the second Orthrus showed up.

Judging that it would be dangerous to do battle while unarmed members like Airi and Relie were present, Lisha and Krulcifer carried out the Orthrus's extermination at the seventh floor, while Celis lead the group and moved towards the eighth floor.

If they could go to the eighth floor, they would be able to open the door of dedicated passages that connected to the deck. They had confirmed with La Cruche that they would be able to return again to the eighth floor using that passage next time.

And then with this, the most dangerous place in the Ark, that was the Abyss manufacture area, was cleared.

The remaining floors only had exceptionally short distances that had to be traveled compared to the previous floors, and it seemed there was also little danger.

Therefore, the possibility that they could safely conquer the Ruin before they finished their training camp and returned home was heightened.

「Even so, something is strange.....」

「What is?」

Krulcifer asked with her usual cool expression towards Lisha's muttering.

「I'm also troubled if you ask me what is strange but..... If I have to say, it's everything. The events and situations since we came to the training camp until now, no matter what it doesn't feel matched up. Krulcifer, what do you think?」

「.....This is unexpected. It looks like you are more attentive than I thought.」

「Fufu, well yeah. Even though I look like this, sometimes I too will—wait, you're subtly making a fool of me right!?」

After nodding proudly for a moment, Lisha frowned and snapped at Krulcifer.

But, Krulcifer eluded her calmly and continued her talk.

「The appearance of a Ruin that no one knew or even predicted. The Ruin investigation that even drastically altered the original training camp schedule. And then, Airi-chan and Headmaster Relie coming along on this training camp. No, rather than that—why did the headmaster intentionally make that girl, whose physical health is bad, come along here?」

「You mean that natural airhead? Certainly that's strange. I thought that the headmaster was surely doting on her little sister to an overprotective degree, but.....」

「Yes, that's right. You understand already if your thoughts have reached that far don't you? Just what the source of the strange out of place feeling from this training camp is—」

「.....Don't tell me」

When Lisha got that inkling, at that moment,

『Lisha-sama, Krulcifer-san. Asking for response. Are you two safe?』

A transmission of Dragon Voice came in and the two lifted their faces at the same time.

『Noct, what's the matter? Is everyone safe?』

『—Yes. We safely reached the center of the eighth floor and opened the direct passage to the deck. But.....』

The voice of Noct who usually kept composed was slightly tinged with impatience.

Lisha and Krulcifer's expressions also tensed from her air.

『Due to a cave-in and appearance of multiple Abyss midway, we lost sight of Airi. If the two of you are safe, please cooperate with the search.』

『Got it! We'll head there right away! Eighth floor right!?』

Lisha yelled and immediately drove away her Tiamat.

Krulcifer similarly nodded and together they flew through the corridor.

Part 4

「Uu..... nn」

After the appearance of the Orthrus, a confusion occurred due to a cave-in at a part of the seventh floor.

And then, Airi was separated from the group because of the melee against the spilling out multiple Abyss, she was now walking alone in a corridor of the Ark.

Her current position was most likely the latter half of the eighth floor.

She couldn't even see clearly for a few mel ahead because several lighting went out due to impact.

For the time being, it was a small mercy that she wasn't injured at least, but she wondered if everyone was safe.

Besides,

「Nii-san—is he safe right now?」

The gloomy atmosphere and the coldness filled her with unease.

As always, when she was alone her weakness like when she was still sickly came out.

Her sickness and frailness led her to depend on someone else.

That was something that came from the instinct of a living being of wanting to receive the protection from the people close to her, but because of that, she caused her only big brother to worry very much after her mother died.

Perhaps because she was at the age of entering puberty, she was usually really shy to say it out, but she was really grateful towards her brother.

After the Old Empire was reborn as the New Kingdom because of the coup d'etat that Lux caused, she thought that she too had to change.

As his only beloved family, this time she wanted to support her brother with her own strength.

Thinking that, she endeavored to study harder than anyone in the academy and obtained various knowledge as a civil official.

She obtained the knowledge about Drag-Rides and the Abyss, she was also more skilled than any student in deciphering the Ruin's ancient texts, Relie had also entrusted her with the position as the exclusive aide of Syvalles the other day.

She got along well with the girls in the academy, and she could also more or less accommodate her big brother.

She believed that, although imperfect, she had managed to grow up splendidly.

Despite so.

「Please quickly come here if you're safe. It's really cold here you know?」

A wide space enclosed within darkness.

A situation where she didn't even understand where she was walking to and the strange sounds that she could faintly hear became fear that encroached into her heart.

Suddenly, a cold wind caressed her cheek and Airi spontaneously shivered.

「.....Nii-san too has become really cold-hearted. Because of that my body got really cold. Because he didn't quickly come here to get me—」

Airi was whispering while slowly reaching out her hand to empty air. Then she suddenly returned to her senses and lifted up her face.

「Just what am I saying.」

If someone heard her talking to herself like this, it would feel really embarrassing for her.

Airi looked around herself restlessly with a slightly red face.

Even so it was fine if she could be distracted.

The dangerous time was exactly the time when she had to be calm.

If she got scared and panicked, then acted rashly because of that, death would be waiting for her.

When he looked at the direction where there was no loud sound, it didn't seem like there was any Abyss nearby, but depending on the species there was also the possibility of them camouflaging or hiding themselves.

It was still too soon for her to loudly call out to her comrades.

Thinking so, Airi continued to walk cautiously.

If the direct passage that connected the eighth floor and the deck that La Cruche told them was at least nearby, she would be able to escape by herself, but that was only an overly convenient imagination.

As a protection charm, she was carrying the horn flute that could manipulate the Abyss.

Regarding its mechanism and the way to play it, she was taught how to by La Cruche not long ago through Krulcifer, and she somehow managed to learn just the basics, but using it was accompanied with risks.

「I don't really want to use this though.....」

Shelving its use as her last resort, Airi walked while avoiding massive rubble and followed along the wall that divided the area.

「.....-」

After she walked for a few minutes, she could hear a small sound.

Airi immediately hid herself and her hand reached towards the horn in her breast pocket.

Should she blow it or not? A hasty decision would be fatal.

Inside the extreme tension that made her hesitate to even breath—

「.....that, something like this」

The clearly human voice entered Airi's ears.

「.....!？」

Airi almost reflexively ran towards that way, but she held herself back with an

effort.

It seemed that there was a group in the neighboring area with a thick wall interposing her from them.

However, that voice didn't come from girls, it was the rough voice of men.

The private force that Marquis Dobar brought here with him.

Even so if she told them her story and asked for help, surely they wouldn't ignore her.

But more importantly than that, she felt discomfort from the atmosphere of their conversation. Airi stayed quiet, she killed her presence and approached stealthily.

「It turned into something bad. Like this the Abyss might get out and even the people of Ries Island will get harmed. If it became known that we caused this incident because we forcefully broke through the manufacture area—」

It was the voice of the elderly group leader.

Airi who heard that sentence instantly understood.

As expected, that alarm sound and the release of the Abyss was the doing of Marquis Dobar's group.

According to the international agreement, it was everyone's responsibility to avoid the Abyss's appearance as much as possible so that unnecessary damage wouldn't be caused by the Ruin investigation.

If it was reported that this disaster was because of their blunder, than that group's leader and Dobar himself would be judged in a trial.

「You really don't get it. How many years have you been wielding your sword under me?」

A bit after that, Airi could hear Marquis Dobar's voice.

There wasn't any tone of panic or regret in his voice. Instead his voice oozed out composure and joy.

「You still haven't noticed my intention. Just why do you think I made the Empire's Assassin Dagger break the door of the manufacture area?」

「Do, don't tell me—」

「Are you listening? Currently the Ragnarok protecting this Ark has died, there is the possibility that the door at the Ruin's deepest floor is open. Treasure that no one has ever seen and information on the ancient era. This is the perfect chance to make all of those mine. Therefore, we have to prioritize becoming the first one to reach the deepest floor the most. Those officer cadets bunch getting dragged into this would actually be ideal.」

「Ho, however..... If those girls, the officer cadets—the Syvalles unit is annihilated, it will become a great loss for the New Kingdom too.....」

「.....Right. In other words, in order to make up for that lost strength, the New Kingdom will have to rely on the treasures that we bring back from the Ruin. That's all.」

Dobar laughed smugly with a crooked smile.

「That Syvalles bunch is an eyesore anyway. If those girls enter the military later on and raise their position, it will shame the male Drag-Knights even more. If they die or even just get hurt, then they become obedient because of that, then that would be best, don't you think?」

「.....As you will.」

The group leader fell silent with those words as his last.

He listened attentively to his master's words and accepted it.

「It's a, horrible talk.....」

Airi unconsciously whispered in a low voice that no one could hear.

She never expected that the other side wasn't running out of control simply because they were impatient to get meritorious deeds, but that they also wanted to harm Syvalles.

She really wanted to denounce them right away, but it would be dangerous if she did that.

The possibility that they would give Airi protection was already very low.

No, far from that, if they became aware that she just heard about their talk—

(Besides, the Empire's Assassin Dagger, where did I hear it before—) Airi was trembling while trying to search back her memory, it was then, 「—My apologies to interrupt your talk. But there is one thing that I noticed though?」

A high and charming voice of a girl resounded in the eighth floor's corridor.

Airi split her attention towards that voice of a girl that shouldn't be among Dobar's private force, it was then,

- kashun*

After such quiet Drag-Ride's mechanical sound, the resistance on Airi's back vanished.

「Eh—?」

- DON!* What collapsed and raised that sound was the partitioning wall behind Airi.

When she turned around, she saw the private force of Dobar wearing Drag-Rides and the figure of a girl that she saw for the first time.

The special shape of the Drag-Ride the girl was wearing made it highly probable that it was a Divine Drag-Ride.

That girl smiled the moment Airi's gaze met hers.

「Wha—?」

The private troops that saw Airi's figure leaked out surprised voices and stiffened.

The flustered Airi immediately tried to hide but,

「Hou. Look who is here—isn't this the criminal former imperial princess who came along with everyone of the academy? I wonder, what happened that you are in that kind of place?」

Dobar's gentle voice and gesture felt terrifying instead.

But, she would meet her end here if she imprudently showed a scared attitude.

「.....Syvalles is in battle with the Abyss, so I took some distance to avoid the danger. The battle will end soon and they should come here then.」

Airi pretended to be calm as much as possible and told them that.

She didn't tell them that she was separated from the others because of the melee but lied that the others planned to meet up with her in order to protect herself.

If they knew that Airi was overhearing their talk by herself then she would be silenced without a doubt.

She made a lie that her comrades would come soon and prayed that Dobar's group would let her go.

「I see. However, that's really dangerous. In this situation we don't know where the Abyss are hiding—. Kirihibe, if my memory serves me right, your Divine Drag-Ride is a Drake type right? Can you search for the group that was with her?」

「It's possible. Please wait for a second.」

The girl called Kirihibe consented calmly.

Even Airi had never seen a Drake type Divine Drag-Ride but—, the ability that normal Drakes possessed—enemy search, camouflage, support, assist, repair, this Divine Drag-Ride should possess all of those too.

If they found Syvalles was nearby, they might take her to them.

When Airi was desperately harboring such wish inside her chest.

「It's unfortunate, but there is no one else nearby. It seems they are a bit farther from here.」

「I see, then kill the criminal lady.」

Airi's thought came to a halt hearing Dobar's unhesitating words.

「Eh.....?」

「Is that okay? She is one of the only two survivors of the Old Empire isn't she?」

The girl called Kirihibe tilted her head with her smile staying unchanged.

「Fuh..... Are you hesitating to sever the bloodline of the empire that you once swore your loyalty to?」

「Yes perhaps, now that you mentioned it, that's how it is.」

The girl called Kiri hime said with a bright and refreshing face that didn't look like she was worried at all.

「But, the Arcadia Empire has perished. Your new lord is I who took you in. Am I wrong?」

「Of course, I acknowledge that.」

「Hmm..... It's fine as long as you understand that. If you are reluctant then I'll let another person do it. Oi.」

Dobar lightly raised his hand and gave his instruction. Then three Drag-Knights including the group leader came forward and surrounded Airi. They lifted their swords.

「Don't think bad of us okay.....」

To say nothing about escaping, she couldn't even beg for her life anymore.

Airi who grasped the situation that she was already beyond help no matter what she did accepted her own fate.

「Nii-san.....!」

Airi squeezed out that word while closing her eyes. At that moment,

「Guah.....!」

Immediately following that short moan, *DON*, there was a loud sound.

When Airi opened her eyes, the three Drag-Knights who were going to kill her were collapsing.

「Wha-.....!?」

The private force of Dobar that was at the back opened their eyes wide in shock.

The girl called Kiri hime was standing in front of Airi with a large blade pulled out.

It was a peculiar weapon called a 『katana』 that possessed a smooth curve.

The girl handled that blade easily and cut down the troops easily.

「Dear me. I was thinking to go along with you all for at least a bit more, but being fickle is my weak point.」

The girl who was the culprit who carried out this violence was continuing to speak matter-of-factly with a tone as though she was making small talk.

「Wha, what are you doing.....!? Yo, you.....you want to betray me!?」

The panicked Dobar hid behind the group of Drag-Knights standing by at the back. He yelled fearfully.

「Please cease with the false accusation. From the start this body had sworn loyalty to the Arcadia Empire. I was merely pretending to cooperate with all of you in order to get out off of the island and come here.」

「-.....!」

Airi realized her reason when she heard the name of the Arcadia Empire.

This girl exposed her true nature when the order to kill Airi, who was an imperial family member of the Old Empire, was given out.

「I, I was the one who rescued you who were imprisoned on the island's prison and welcomed you as my subordinate. That debt—」

「We were only using each other based on convenience. In this kind of relationship, the side that is abandoned first is the one who loses, that's how this works don't you know?」

The eyes of the girl who was smiling cheerfully was suddenly tinged with sharpness.

「Do it! Kill that woman at once! Kill the two of them altoge—」

「Besides, I'm not pleased with you. You are in contradiction with my aesthetics. You pretend to swear loyalty to the Old Empire and also to the New Kingdom, you change your master as easily as flipping your hand depending on the situation, that low-life personality without even a shred of pride in it is—」

Right after that, *kin-!*, the ringing metallic voice could be heard.

At the same time, the seven Drag-Knights that attacked simultaneously stopped still—

「Wha, what happened.....!? The Drag-Ride's movement was.....!」

「What's going on!? Has your Drag-Ride broke down!? Wait, stop—!」

The private troops raised their screams. Right after that, everyone began to attack each other with the weapons in their hands.

Someone pierced the chest of the man beside him, someone stabbed a neck with a dagger, someone turned another into a beehive with their gun.

The spurting out fresh blood dyed the surroundings red, the Drag-Rides were desummoned one after another.

「Hi, HliliH!?」

Dobar screamed after witnessing his troops being turned into corpses by friendly fire and he backed away.

Both his stubby and short legs were entangled with each other and he tumbled on the floor unsightly.

「Wha, what are you doing-.....!? Why, did my troops—」

「My my, you still have the calm to ask that kind of pointless question? You're mistaking the order of your priority. What do you want me to do so you will overlook me? Right now that's the question that you should be asking me.」

The girl who instantly murdered seven Drag-Knights spoke with a kind smile.

That awfully bright voice was obviously mixed with scorn.

「Ple, please. Save me!? I, I'll give you all the money and land that you want! I'll make you into an officer of the New Kingdom.....! You can rise in the world if you work under me, this country is—gebah!/?」

「Haa.....dear me. You are not listening to my words at all, not even the tiniest bit aren't you?」

Dobar's throat was cut along with that exasperated voice.

「That is troubling for me. If something like the New Kingdom exists, then the Arcadia Empire cannot be restored by my hands.」

Dobar fell behind. He then choked on blood and writhed for a while before he soon became unmoving.

「Now then.」

The girl in black clothes turned around and stared at Airi.

She faced Airi who was speechless from great shock and bowed with a friendly smile.

「Thank you for waiting. You are the imperial princess of the Old Empire, her highness Airi Arcadia, correct?」

「That's, right.....」

Airi mustered her courage and managed to answer somehow.

There was no meaning in lying seeing how her hair and eye color was all the proof needed.

「I am called Kirihime Yoruka. A Drag-Knight who was once called as the Empire's Assassin Dagger. The loyal servant of his majesty the Emperor of the Arcadia Empire.」

「.....」

Even Airi had heard at least once regarding the existence of the Empire's Assassin Blade.

She was a Drag-Knight from an island country to the east that was destroyed by the Old Empire in the past, she couldn't be killed no matter how large the army that was invested, she was a devilish girl.

She exchanged a certain pact with the Emperor and entered under his banner, after that the people of authority who witnessed her true strength feared to even make use of that strength and she was sealed into a solitary island as a secret weapon.

But, in the end all of those were only baseless rumors, Airi didn't know

anything about this girl.

Therefore, Airi didn't say anything unnecessary.

Based on what she heard from Dobar's conversation, this girl was faithful to the Old Empire even now when it had perished.

If she said something imprudent, she would be dealt with similarly like them in this place.

「Now then, we have finished the greeting so let's enter the main topic.」

The girl showed an alluring smile and narrowed her eyes.

「Your elder brother—the last male survivor of the Old Empire. His highness Lux Arcadia, where could he be?」

「.....-!？」

Airi's breathing stopped hearing that question that she feared the most.

「Although you are also a member of the imperial family, but men and women exist in completely different dimensions. I more or less have the duty to save you, but that's only after I can meet your elder brother. I have heard from Dobar that he is attached to the academy of Cross Field. He is coming to this island in participation of this training camp thing isn't he?」

Yoruka was talking while peering onto Airi's face with her two differently colored eyes.

Ominous devotion was filling the inside of that friendly smile.

This person.....cannot be allowed to meet Nii-san.

With her arms and legs trembling from fear, Airi resolved herself.

「—No, he isn't here.」

And then, she answered so clearly.

「Is that true? If you are lying—」

「It's true that Nii-san belongs to the academy, but right now he is in the middle of doing another special mission.I'm thankful for the help you gave me, but I still cannot tell you the location of my brother.」

「Is that so, that's unfortunate.」

Hearing that, Yoruka calmly smiled.

Airi who saw Yoruka accept her answer was about to sigh in relieve, it was then, 「You don't intend to say the truth even if I kill you, is that right?」

The smile of Yoruka whose eyes were wide open was right before Airi.

「.....」

Her lie was seen through.

Including her resolve to not speak of Lux's whereabouts even if she was killed.

「Well, that's fine. Let's stop here for now. Actually I wish to meet him immediately even for a second faster, but for now he seems to be safe. The first impression is important for something like this, so..... I will come visit again after I make a little more preparations. Excuse me.....」

Yoruka said only that while bowing with her body still clad in a Drag-Ride. She then turned around her Drag-Ride and it was only her head that looked back towards Airi.

「Aa, I recall one thing. I killed that strange two-headed dog, but the distance from here until the surface is still far. I won't mind escorting you until there you know?」

「.....No thank you. I don't need it.」

「I understand. Please be careful.」

Yoruka smiled in satisfaction and vanished inside the darkness.

Ten seconds later after her presence completely disappeared, Airi's legs lost strength and she fell on her knees.

「Haa, haa.....! Haah.....」

There was only the sound of rough breathing resounding in the out of shape eighth floor's area.

「That person..... just who is she—」

At this point of time Airi shivered and her teeth were clattering.

The acting and lie that she desperately put up were completely seen through, and on top of that she was let go.

That strange mentality and bottomless strength was beyond the imagination even for Airi who had seen various Drag-Knights until now.

「Could it be, that person is stronger than Nii-san.....」

Airi shook her head and denied that imagination.

But, opposite to Airi's will, the trembling of her body didn't disappear.

「She, cannot be allowed, to meet with Nii-san.....」

And then a few minutes later.

She met up with the group of Celis and the others who came searching for her and Airi returned back to the surface.

Episode 5 – Night of Betrayal

Part 1

「With this we can relax somewhat. Everyone, thank you for your hard work.」

Relie said that to the members of Syvalles who returned to the boardinghouse and finished their medical treatment and dinner.

The alarm that was activated at the seventh floor's manufacture area settled down and they were able to safely open the direct passage from the eighth floor to the deck.

They found Airi who was separated from them and there was no member who was seriously harmed.

Philuffy also fell into fever because she fought an Orthrus and collapsed, but her condition was settling down right now.

Tomorrow they would finally aim to reach the control area and the deepest floor. Tonight they would retire to bed.

After Lux talked to Airi who was separated from the group in the afternoon and everyone who fought the Orthrus, Lux visited Philuffy's room.

「How do you feel, Phi-chan?」

「Nn..... I think, I'm hungry.」

When Lux asked, Philuffy got up and said that.

When Relie asked her about what happened right after she woke up, it seemed that Philuffy didn't remember anything after she went out of the Ark chasing after the Orthrus.

It was fortunate that she didn't remember about herself running wild right after that and also about the conversation with Hayes.

「Then, you've already woken up, so do you want to eat something? Something like fruits, I asked Krulcifer-san to cut various things—」

「Yes. Thank you.」

「Then, I'll feed you today.」

Normally Lux couldn't do that because he would feel embarrassed, but he was able to act naturally towards the current Philuffy.

(It feels like we returned to when we were children.....) Lux recalled the period when he spent time with Philuffy both inside and outside the palace.

Lux used a fork to carry the assortment of fruits Krulcifer had cut for him bit by bit into Philuffy's mouth.

Philuffy was continuing to eat them silently with her mouth moving like a small animal.

「Is it delicious?」

「.....Yes」

It was a short reply, but Lux could sense Philuffy's happiness from the slight change of her expression.

「Lu-chan too, eat with me.」

Philuffy silently took the fork from Lux's hand and stabbed at the orange on the plate.

And then she silently presented it towards Lux's mouth.

「Eh.....!? I, I'm fine. Besides—」

It was the same fork Philuffy just used, so he felt a bit embarrassed.

Lux thought like that and his heart pounded hard. Seeing such Lux, Philuffy brought her face close towards him.

「Here.」

She urged him with an attitude that didn't bother at all about Lux's rejection.

「.....」

As expected, he wasn't a match against Philuffy.

The orange that was steadily fed to him felt especially sweet.

「.....Then, rest at ease until your body recovers okay? If you need something, call someone right away.」

After the fruit plate was emptied, Lux turned off the lamp's light and he was about to leave—.

「Lu-chan.」

Her single word that he suddenly heard caused Lux to twitch and stiffen.

The Ratatoskr of Yggdrasil that was planted on Philuffy's heart.

It wouldn't be strange even if the impulse of the command that Hayes sent to Philuffy through the Yggdrasil ran wild anytime.

When Lux turned around nervously,

「It's no good, if you act too recklessly you know?」

He saw the usual gentle face of Philuffy there.

But, Lux's expression froze seeing that face.

One of Philuffy's eyes was dyed jet black, the golden pupil in it was shining.

But, Philuffy's expression was the same as usual. It was unknown whether she noticed it herself or not. Lux stared at her in a daze.

「.....Right, I, know.」

He barely nodded back and Lux left the room.

「Rest well, Phi-chan.」

And then he quietly closed the door. Lux walked in the corridor with heavy footsteps.

After walking for around a few mel, he knocked his forehead on the wall.

「Uu....., a, aa.....」

The inside of his head was going around in circles, the world warped.

His limbs shook and he didn't know what his expression looked like.

「How.....! Why!? Did I not save Philuffy that time.....!? Why, why, I—」

When Lux headed towards another room as though running away, there was Relie standing in the middle of the corridor.

「Thank you for looking after her, Lux-kun.」

Her face didn't have her usual joking expression, it was a face that somewhat looked quiet.

「How about, we talk a little?」

Following Relie's words, Lux headed towards another room away from that place.

「Looking at your face, it looks like you have noticed it already haven't you?」

Lux guessed the truth from Relie's extremely calm words.

「Do you know, about Philuffy's condition.....?」

Lux asked with an empty expression.

It was a dark voice that was chilly even for him.

「I don't know as far as the specifics, but I too only realized it recently.」

Relie opened a room's door with a smile that was mixed with self-derision.

It was the personal room for the use of the manager. On the table inside the room, there were documents that Relie brought from the Academy piled up high there.

Most likely, she herself was also investigating the information from the Ruins even after giving Airi the work to decipher the ancient text of the Ruins.

Looking for a way to save her little sister that assimilated with an Abyss.

「.....Where should I begin from, I wonder. Lux-kun, do you remember about the incident when Philuffy was kidnapped by the Old Empire's military in the past?」

「Yes.....」

There was no way he would forget.

Five years ago, he cooperated with Lisha's father, Count Atismata, and planned the coup d'etat. He heard about the incident from his eldest brother Fugil and came to this Ries Island alone.

That disgusting incident where young girls were taken away under the guise of medical care, when it was actually in order to do medical experimentation of military weapons.

Lux located the experiment site. When he arrived at the experiment facility underground the monastery, he didn't find Philuffy there.

「That time, I sent a letter to Lux-kun, saying that Philuffy was saved.」

「.....Was that, a lie?」

「Half of it.」

「Eh.....?」

Lux opened his eyes wide at Relie's baffling answer.

「She actually should be dead. When we discovered her, it was already.....too late. Even the doctor I brought with me threw up the towel and stopped his examination. But—after that, Philuffy was resurrected together with a mysterious light and pattern.」

「.....」

That must be the Ratatoskr Hayes mentioned.

A part of a Ragnarok, the offshoot seed that Yggdrasil supplied combined with Philuffy and saved her.

「Seeing her condition at that time, I wondered whether there was something dangerous planted inside Philuffy. Since then, Philuffy's body became tougher than before. If she was serious, she can exert strength that even an adult cannot compare with. I entrusted Philuffy to a teacher from a martial art family to teach her the way to suppress her strength. I hid my little sister's condition while investigating about the thing planted inside her.」

「.....」

「I noticed that my little sister had become something like an Abyss since I

became headmaster here and Philuffy became a student. That's why even when Philuffy became a Divine Drag-Ride user, I excluded Philuffy from getting involved with Ruins and from the Abyss extermination duty. It's because the Abyss is a target to be disposed off in the New Kingdom's law. If this fact became known by someone—there is a high chance that she would get killed.]

「Such thing.....!」

Lux who was listening until now spontaneously yelled.

Relie who saw that made an empty smile along with a small sigh.

「For me, the insides of that Ruin is my last hope. It's only a slight possibility, but it's the only place with any chance where I can save my little sister. If I can grasp the information at the untrodden deepest level, then perhaps it would also be possible to save a human that has assimilated with an Abyss.」

「That's why you used us to investigate the Ruin without taking permission from the New Kingdom.....?」

「.....Yes, that's right.」

Relie nodded in resignation towards Lux's question and confirmed it.

And then, she took a deep breath and showed a face that contained determination in it.

「Regarding what I'm doing, I'm doing it with the resolve to accept the consequences. I don't regret it, and I don't intend to. I'll reach the deepest floor in this time's Ruin investigation no matter what.」

「Relie-san.....」

「I don't mind even if you tell everyone. At that time I intend to go alone. It seems according to La Cruche, the Abyss almost surely won't come out in the remaining distance until the deepest level anyway, if I'm lucky I can reach there.」

Relie said only that then she silently sat on a chair inside the room.

And then she looked down as though to say that she had no more words.

Lux went out of the silent room and looked up to the sky from the corridor's

window.

「.....」

Lux couldn't say anything.

The parasite body of a Ragnarok that was administered into Philuffy was constantly receiving the command to kill Lux. Because Philuffy rejected it, her body was weakening.

The time until Philuffy's life ran out wasn't that long anymore.

「What should I choose.....」

The answer didn't come out even when he looked up to the sky.

Part 2

The next day, the Ruin investigation was carried out since the morning.

They started the investigation from the stopping point at the eighth floor and hurried through the path that was almost a straight line.

Airi and Relie participated this time too. Including them there were thirteen people participating, but Philuffy was resting at the boardinghouse because her condition wasn't well.

Fortunately, they reached safely until the tenth floor without encountering the Abyss just as expected.

While continuing to walk the corridor where unfamiliar strange objects were lining up, La Cruche suddenly stopped her legs, and then, she looked up to the ceiling with her small body.

「Everyone, thank you for accompanying me until this far. We have safely arrived at the control room area. I will open the door after this, so can I ask for a little help?」

「I'll do it. What do I need to do?」

Krulcifer replied like that earlier than everyone and came forward.

This was something that she had arranged beforehand with La Cruche.

The cooperation of Krulcifer who was a Xfer, someone who inherited the blood of the Ruin's supervisor, was necessary to open the door of the control room area. She wanted to hide that true identity of hers.

For that, La Cruche asked for the cooperation of 『someone』 to hide that fact.

『Xfer's existence is confirmed. The door will open.』

The door of the control room area was opened along with the sensation of an unfamiliar inorganic voice echoing directly inside the brain.

It was a fairytale-like space that was enveloped with a faint mysterious light.

「Please wait for just a bit. I will supplement my memory and restore the Ark's system.」

And then, La Cruche sat down on a small chair at the center of the room. At the same time, something like a helm came down from overhead and connected with her.

She slowly closed her eyes and began to concentrate her consciousness.

「If everyone has spare time, it's fine even if you all go ahead to look at this Ruin's deepest part you know? It looks like it will take quite a bit of time until my lost memory is restored.」

「Then we will do as you say. Airi-chan, will you come with me?」

「Ah, yes. I don't mind but—it's just.....」

Relie immediately agreed and she was about to head to the deepest part. In contrast Airi was mumbling as though she wanted to say something. Even so she nodded.

Lux and the others also accompanied the two of them.

The distance from the tenth floor's control room area until the deepest part was really short.

After they went down cream colored, smooth stairs, they could see the door of the deepest level.

It was a grey colored gate that was far firmer than everything until now.

「This place, so this is.....」

Relie touched the solid door and muttered emotionally.

She approached the strange gem before the gate, but there wasn't any reaction.

『.....Ah, please don't give any impact to that room over there.』

「Uwah.....!？」

Lux and Lisha reacted in surprise hearing that voice that came out of

nowhere.

Krulcifer calmly looked up and muttered.

「La Cruche. Is this your voice?」

『Yes master. I'm contacting you through the communication equipment and monitoring devices deployed through the Ark. The last room will need your—not that, it needs specific authentication, but as long as you have that then you'll be able to enter inside.』

「Then, can you teach me that method?」

Relie urged from the side.

She was feigning calm, but most likely she was impatient inside.

She wanted to obtain the knowledge of the ancient era as soon as possible, decipher it, and find a method to save Philuffy.

Everyone present there gulped and held their breaths, it was then—

「Please wait!」

Suddenly Airi spoke out and broke the mood.

While everyone there held their tongues from the surprise, Airi started talking with a trembling voice.

「This morning I deciphered an ancient text—it's a text that was newly obtained from the Garden previously. It was written there that a mobile device of a weapon that mustn't be touched is sleeping here. About the details, even I was unable to decipher it, and it also needs confirmation from the government so I stayed quiet but..... If, this translation is correct then—」

「Don't tell me, what destroyed the ancient era that created this Ruin was.....」

Airi silently nodded at Lux's muttering.

「Yes, it's highly likely that it was because of that weapon. If the forbidden device sleeping at the Ruin's deepest part is activated, we don't know what will happen. It's dangerous for us to decide it right now.」

「That might be so.」

Krulcifer also agreed with Airi's fearful opinion.

「If there is a secret that important inside, then we cannot open this with our own discretion. We should send messengers to the capital and ask for the decision from above. We also have to obtain the information at the control room area from La Cruche, and then every country needs to have a discussion with each other based on that.」

「.....」

Relie's shoulders were quaking a bit beside Krulcifer who was talking calmly.

Even Lux could understand her feelings like the back of his own hand.

Philuffy's condition was a race against time.

Surely Relie wanted to enter this room right now without wasting time.

Lux also felt the same as her.

If the door of the deepest part wasn't opened until the sunset of two days later—

Hayes's words crossed through his mind.

However, he couldn't divulge that fact right now in this place.

While Lux was feeling conflicted, Relie made a choice.

「—It can't be helped.」

She made a gentle expression and calmly spoke.

「Certainly it will be dangerous to enter the deepest part with our current group. Let's come back again here later. The restoration of La Cruche's memory will also finish around that time.」

「Yes.....」

Airi leaked out a relieved sigh.

With her methodical personality, originally she wouldn't immediately speak about the content of the ancient text she deciphered, instead she would confirm it with other experts first without fail to make sure that her translation was correct, but this time the content was too risky, so that was why she was

flustered like that.

They met up with the other members, and then after explaining that, they returned back to the surface.

La Cruche said that it would take half a day for her to restore all her lost memory.

And then after getting information from her, they would submit their report to the new kingdom government and wait for the next instruction regarding the Ruin investigation.

They finished talking with such conclusion.

「Come to think of it, where is that guy called Dobar or something? Even though that guy was that hasty, but we didn't catch sight of him at all—」

Lisha said that while they were going back. Everyone exchanged opinions casually, but in the end they all returned to the surface without knowing anything.

At night, inside the boardinghouse after dinner it was silent as death as though the bustling atmosphere a few days ago was just a lie.

Other than the training camp, there was also the Ruin investigation and the fights against the Abyss.

More than half of the members reached their limit from the fatigue of training and investigation every day. They quickly headed to their bedroom after lightly washing off their sweat.

When Lux returned to his room, there was Airi nodding off while facing her desk.

She must be tired from the nervousness of traveling inside the Ruin in flesh without wearing protection and from her work deciphering the ancient text.

Lux carried her in his arms and moved her to the bed, then put a blanket on her.

He thought to consult her, but as expected he couldn't involve Airi.

Philuffy was sleeping inside her room. She didn't show any signs of waking up.

The promised date was approaching.

〔Finish your investigation in two days.〕

Hayes's objective might be the activation of the forbidden device that Airi mentioned.

If he asked Krulcifer to open the last door, it was possible that the device would get stolen by Hayes, and the New Kingdom—no, the world itself would be in danger.

「—What should I do?」

Even though he wanted to save Philuffy no matter how faint the hope was—he couldn't decide.

Perhaps what he was going to choose might become a repeat of the same mistake as that time.

Just like before, when for the sake of his wish to change the country, he caused a war and he failed.

(Even so, I—)

Lux gripped the sheath of his Sword Device hard and closed his eyes tightly, it was then,

「——」

Dread ran through him.

Even Lux didn't understand what was going on at first, he looked at his fingertips and knees that were starting to shake, and he noticed the cause.

The night on the island that was wrapped in the roar of the sea.

A monster melted into the tranquil darkness and held its breath.

「.....」

Lux wordlessly got up and went out of the boardinghouse through the backdoor so that the other members wouldn't find him.

He crossed through the bushes where there was no lighting and came out into an open space.

That man was standing under the brilliantly shining full moon.

「—It has been a long time, my younger brother. O the weakest hero who was defeated in a battle of ideals.」

A calm and elegant voice, and a composed bearing.

He was wearing a luxurious overcoat. Silver hair, fiercely glaring gray eyes that reminded one of a hungry beast. He was that man without a doubt.

- dokun.....!*

Lux's heart jumped, it caused a hallucination as though his blood was flowing in reverse.

The face of his only relative who understood him.

And the scorning face that was looking down on the fallen him.

The countless memories until that point flowed inside Lux's mind in an instant—

「Fugil Arcadia.....!」

He spouted those words as though they were pushed out from his lungs.

The man who was the first imperial prince of the Old Arcadia Empire, planned the coup d'etat together with Lux..... and then he was the man who betrayed Lux at the end and erased the remaining imperial family.

Lux's longtime enemy, the older brother that he was chasing for these five years.

「.....Why are you here?」

His throat felt terribly parched just from saying that short sentence.

Lux questioned with a tense voice, and at the same time he drew out Bahamut's Sword Device.

At this distance, it was faster to directly slash at the opponent rather than summoning and deploying a Drag-Ride.

And also, there was no sign or presence of enemies in the surrounding other than Fugil.

He could take the initiative at the instant of the opening when the opponent prepared for summoning.

Lux slowly closed the distance while observing Fugil.

「Was that Heiburg's strategist called Hayes, also instigated by you?」

「What if I say that's true?」

Fugil showed a fearless smile and jested.

Lux didn't overlook the instant of an opening when Fugil breathed in to reply.

「I'll capture you.」

Lux kicked on the ground that was covered with grass while muttering that at the same time.



Lux stepped forward with a low posture. He swung his sword quickly at the same time, tripping the foot of Fugil who tried to dodge.

「Oof.....!」

Fugil fell down face up. Right after that, Lux swiftly thrust the tip of his sword on Fugil's throat.

「.....I see. You intend to take me hostage to save your childhood friend by using me to bargain for her release?」

Fugil asked with a composed smile without even a twitch in his eyebrows.

Lux glared at him and silently affirmed it, then,

「Really it's just as I expected from you, my younger brother.」

An admiring voice came from behind Lux.

「—!？」

Lux who had progressed the event calmly until now instantly opened his eyes wide in surprise.

The figure of the man who should be lying down on the ground with a sword pointed at his throat was vanishing.

When Lux turned around in panic, there was Fugil calmly standing above a low-rise hill at a slight distance away.

「Wha.....!？」

(What happened!?)

Lux was confused by the impossible reality.

(I didn't take my eyes off of him even for a moment. He also didn't use any distraction or that my attention was diverted. And yet, how—) 「Way to go my younger brother. Amazing thought and judgment as expected. The moment you saw me, your bitter enemy, if it's a normal person they would only stand still trying to understand the situation, but you formed several plans in merely a few moments and carried them out.」

Fugil continued his words looking like he was enjoying it happily from the bottom of his heart, along with a wicked smile on his face.

「You predicted my connection with Hayes, thought a plan to capture me to make use of me as negotiation material, and you tried to make it a reality. That was an action that was unthinkable to come from someone who had been beaten to the punch. It was also amazing how you dared not to call your Drag-Ride in order to take me by surprise.」

「.....」

With a snap, Fugil sheathed his sword while smiling.

Lux only noticed just now that the brother he was confronting had unsheathed his sword without him realizing it.

Did he overlook that because he was too flustered?

(—No, that's not it. Fugil didn't unsheathe his sword, I've no doubt about that.) Perhaps his hand held the sword handle and moved in just an instant. But, even so what was the connection?

(No! It's not the time to think about that right now!)

Lux aborted his thought that was starting to wander off course. He concentrated towards the phenomenon before him.

At any rate, his first attack missed and a distance was opened between them.

He could only call Bahamut.

Lux put his strength onto the button on the sword handle, and he was going to whisper the passcode, it was at that instant, 「But, unfortunately you misread the situation, my younger brother. I don't have any worth at all as a hostage. It's pointless to capture me.」

Fugil informed indifferently so as though to shave off Lux's resolve.

「And then you are going to commit a great mistake. If you start to fight me here, there will be no helping your childhood friend anymore for eternity.」

「.....-」

Lux's hand stopped hearing Fugil's extremely calm statement.

「What do you..... mean?」

「I'm trying to stop that woman called Hayes. I should be her ally, but that

woman is deviating too much from our original conduct you see. It's necessary to correct the course here. In other words it's only in this moment right now—that my interests aligns with yours.]

「.....」

「To control that Yggdrasil—the Ragnarok's main body, a particular requirement is necessary. The horn flute that brat is carrying is specially made, a one and only item that is called『Origin Variety』. Therefore—if you can just destroy or steal it, she won't be able to give new instructions to the Ragnarok anymore. And then if you can just defeat the main body of Yggdrasil, you can remove the harm towards that childhood friend of yours. That's how it is, even if, for example, the blood of the Abyss is already residing in half of her body.」

「.....Do you have any proof that this isn't your trap?」

Lux fixed his expression so that the agitation in his heart couldn't be detected and he asked.

There was no way he could just swallow the words of his enemy Fugil, but he asked that in order to probe Fugil's true intention.

「Unfortunately, I can only put my hope on your discernment for that. That's including your discernment of whether I have any need to tell such lie.」

「.....」

The horn flute to use on a Ragnarok that only Hayes possessed, the Origin Variety.

Previously, when Poseidon was resurrected, Hayes was hiding inside the shadow of her robe and he couldn't see what she was doing.

But, two days ago when Hayes showed up in front of him, the horn flute that he saw she was holding had a strange pattern engraved on it.

「—Is that, everything you want to say?」

「No, putting aside my advice, I have one thing I want to ask. Assuming that what I said was all true—do you really have the intention to save that childhood friend of yours?」

「.....」

In response to Fugil's question, Lux met his gaze wordlessly.

「As I thought, you haven't changed huh. You are still the same as that time, foolish and weak.」

Fugil sighed in exasperation and he looked up to empty air.

With his back still facing the deep ultramarine of the darkness, he formed a smile that could even be called as an evil countenance.

「Didn't you notice that you too are trying to do the same thing as that woman called Relie? Saving what is important, an existence that is irreplaceable for you. Certainly it sounds nice, but in actuality doing that is a betrayal towards this country and those students. You are committing a folly that might turn you into the enemy of the world.」

「It's evil—is that what you want to say?」

「No.....」

Unexpectedly Fugil instantly denied it.

「It's troubling because it's not evil or anything. However, if there are a thousand people then there would be a thousand paths of justice—I don't have any intention to speak of any tomfoolery like that. They don't have any awareness of good and evil, this is nothing more than them merely being in conflict regarding something that they cannot concede, only natural.」

Fugil continued so still wearing his composed smile.

「That is the nature of living things as it were. People who have been hungry in the past will try to gather more food. The weak will try to obtain even stronger power. People who have their important persons robbed from them will try to protect their important persons desperately. And then—」

Fugil peered into the eyes of Lux who was still holding up his sword and laughed.

「Someone who wasn't loved by anyone, will try to be loved by anyone.」

「.....」

Lux didn't reply at all towards Fugil's words.

But, he narrowed his shadowed eyes and spoke.

「Why, did you kill all the imperial family and the army of the Old Empire that day? Your true objective—what is it?」

「The current you won't understand even if I told you.」

Fugil replied with a tone that was mixed with a sigh.

「But, someday you will understand if you keep walking your path as it is. In the future each nation will develop even more intense conflict. The lot of the New Kingdom will approach to make use of you and your comrade's strength. They will come to take you into their fold. They will try to lure you into a repulsive path, carrying the great cause that is no other than『To protect the New Kingdom's peace』.」

「.....」

「You should understand before long. Just what I did on that day. Why did I make use of you. If you get involved with this country again, and yet you will still try to persist in your ideal, then—」

Fugil turned around. He tilted his head and looked back with a smile.

「You will understand that nothing exists in this world. Whether it's your ideal, or what you want to protect, everything.」

He left behind only those words and walked away.

When Lux stepped forward to chase after him, he saw Fugil draw out his Sword Device.

The blade glistened with light, silver lines were running through it.

The sword emitted undulating faint light of seven colors.

「Uu..... ku.....！」

Sharp and piercing pain instantly ran at the back of Lux's eyes. Lux pressed his hand on his forehead and fell on one knee.

When he noticed, Fugil was vanishing like a mist.

It was as though nothing was there right from the start.

「Oooii! Lux!」

A voice came while Lux was staring at the darkness in blank amazement.

When he turned around, he saw the figure of Lisha approaching him in a run.

「Lisha, sama.....」

「I finally completed it! I succeeded in the last system removal so that your Bahamut can use the awakened state! It's thanks to the code that your little sister solved. But—」

She talked in excitement until midway before her tone became faltering.

「This thing, as I thought it's better not to use it..... It's a good thing that the ability can come to light but, the burden is too great. Using that with Bahamut is still—」

「Please teach me! I beg you!」

「Wah!？」

Lux took both her hands and pleaded.

The surprised Lisha was blushing while,

「Ca, calm down. Certainly it's a failed work right now, but perhaps it will become usable depending on future improvements. That's why, don't be reckless. Letting you do something dangerous by yourself more than this is—」

「I beg you, Lisha-sama.」

Lux sent her a serious gaze and didn't let go of her hands.

「A time will come where I have to use it. At this rate, it might turn into something I regret again. I—don't want, to repeat the same thing as that time!」

「That, time.....?」

When Lisha tilted her head, a strange scene was revived at the back of Lux's mind.

That day when the Old Empire was finished.

Sparks danced in the sky, swarms of Drag-Rides crossed in the dark night.

And then—

「-.....!？」

The consciousness of Lux that was receding away was called back.

The sensation of soft and smooth small hands.

In front of him Lisha was grasping back at Lux's hands while her cheeks were slightly dyed red.

「I, I get it.」

She directed her gaze at Lux with a slightly exasperated face and puffed up cheeks.

「You won't listen to anything once you already speak. Even though normally you are that humble..... But, the code to release Bahamut is complicated, so I have to teach you from scratch you know?」

「Thank you very much, Lisha-sama.」

「.....Fuh」

Seeing Lux bowing his head really deeply, Lisha smiled with a troubled look.

—With this, the preparations were in order.

This was the only plan left that could save Philuffy within tonight.

Lux resolved himself like that in his heart. It was then that Lisha suddenly lifted up her face, 「Come to think of it, where is Relie? I was looking for her since some time ago to get the permission to use the awakened mode—」

「—」

Lux suddenly realized hearing that.

「.....I'm sorry, Lisha-sama.」

And then a few second later Lux turned to face Lisha and told her with a

serious expression.

「Can I ask you to contact everyone? If Relie-san cannot be found anywhere then—」

Saying that, Lux resolved himself.

It was the determination to plunge himself into the upheaval once more.

「I'll look for her. At the deepest level of the Ruin—」

Part 3

Ten minutes later. Everyone split to search for Relie at the likely places like the boarding house, the practice ground, and other places.

But, there wasn't any sign of her at all.

There was also the possibility that she was kidnapped by someone, but Lux had an idea to her whereabouts.

The Ruin.

In order to look for a way to erase the Ratatoskr of the Ragnarok taking hold of Philuffy, Relie planned to slip into the deepest level.

Therefore, Lux would slip into the Ruin alone in order to not involve the other students.

From here onward, there was the possibility that the students would get dragged into a serious crime.

If they weren't careful, it wouldn't end as only the problem of the New Kingdom. It might become a big international problem that could affect the international tournament that would start after this.

(But..... I cannot leave her alone like this.) In the night duty room in the boardinghouse where Relie was.

There was a letter placed on the table there. It was only written with 'Please take care of Philuffy'.

Lux who sensed an alarming atmosphere from the letter hurriedly moved to exit the boardinghouse, it was then—

「Lu-chan. Wait.」

「Philuffy.....!？」

When he looked there, Philuffy was getting up with her face red and her body

staggering.

「You must not! Right now, if you don't sleep—」

There was no way he could talk about the Ragnarok, so Lux told her like that in panic.

However,

「I, already know.」

「Eh.....?」

「That in my body, there is an Abyss.」

Philuffy said that with her usual absentminded tone and serious face.

The moment Lux heard that, the inside of his head became blank.

「Philuf, fy.....」

A listless voice was squeezed out from Lux's lungs.

「Sorry, for staying quiet.」

Philuffy calmly smiled while saying that.

「.....I noticed it recently but, well, it doesn't really matter.」

「Eeh!？」

Lux was taken by surprise from Philuffy's words that were still at her own pace even now.

But,

「Yes. Because, it's important that I live. Because, if I die, both Onee-chan and Lu-chan will surely be sad.」

Philuffy lightly put her hand on her chest and muttered.

「Onee-chan, after Okaa-san died from sickness, she looked like she was really lonely. That was why, I thought, I cannot die.」

Philuffy continued talking while smiling. Her tone was detached in nostalgia.

「Lu-chan is also someone who get lonely really easily, so I thought that it will be really painful for you, if I die.」

「——」

「That's why—I'm glad, I'm alive until today.」

Lux's chest tightened hearing that sentence that was like a surprise attack.

He wondered since when he misunderstood that Philuffy didn't notice.

Normally Philuffy was silent and she wasn't good in expressing her emotion, but with her sharp intuition, she understood about Lux and Relie more than anyone.

Of course that included how Lux and Relie were actually alive while carrying unbearable loneliness and wounds.

And also how if Philuffy, who was their support, died, both of them would lose sight of themselves.

Philuffy knew all about the change of her own body, she noticed it, but she still tried to live.

「But, it's already okay.」

Saying that, Philuffy made a transient smile.

「Because, Lu-chan already made, a lot of important people. Because, you've become strong.」

She said that with a voice that sounded just a little lonely.

「That's why surely, you'll be fine.」

That voice that was trying to reassure him was the same like that time seven years ago.

However, it was different from that time.

「—You're wrong-!」

Lux reflexively yelled, but he couldn't speak further.

And then, he strongly embraced the body of Philuffy before him.

「Lu, chan?」

Warm body and the faint sweet fragrance.

Lux whispered while pushing down his emotion that usually made his heart pound hard at this kind of time.

「I'm, no good..... I haven't changed at all since then.....I'm still, weaker than anyone else!」

Faint surprise and perplexity could be felt from the girl inside his arms.

Even so, Lux didn't let go of her.

「Don't disappear..... The wound inside me still remained all this time since that day! It was because Philuffy saved me that day, because you stayed alive until today, that I could fight as the prince of the Arcadia Empire!」

A person who lost the important person that they ought to protect.

A person who cursed the whole world and turned it into an enemy, such person wouldn't be able to change a country.

「That's why, don't go! Don't disappear! I absolutely, this time for sure I absolutely will save you! That's why—」

「I see.」

A gentle sensation of a hand caressed Lux's front hair.

When he noticed, Philuffy was making a faint smile at him.

「Lu-chan, still hasn't changed.」

「.....」

Philuffy caressed Lux's cheek in nostalgia and muttered.

「Thank you. I'll wait.」

It was only a brief sentence.

But it was the demonstration of will showed by the silent Philuffy using words.

Lux understood everything just from that.

「Please, take care of Onee-chan.」

「Yes.」

Lux nodded firmly and turned around.

And then, the moment he turned his back, Philuffy's voice called out to him.

「Also, call me Phi-chan, okay?」

「Yes.....sorry.」

Lux smiled wryly hearing Philuffy's words that sounded a bit sullen.

「.....Then, I'm going, Phi-chan.」



And then Lux exited the boardinghouse and started running.

Part 4

Lux ran at full speed along the coast late at night.

Lux asked Lisha and the others to communicate to everyone at the surface to not go near the Ruin, and for them to wait until Relie and Lux returned.

If he tried to get the cooperation of Lisha and the others, they would get dragged into this dangerous battle where there would be no return.

Lux jumped onto the deck of the Ark, opened the door of the direct passage, then stepped above the relay portal.

「—Come, the symbol of power the winged dragon of crest. Obey my sword and take flight, Wyvern!」

First Lux equipped Wyvern and waited. Then the transfer began.

The corridor of the eighth floor that they previously reached now had bluish white lamp shining, different from before.

「Did the system, recover?」

La Cruche was recovering her memory at the control room area and restored her authority as the Gear Leader.

Originally everything should turn out well with that but—

「GURORORO.....!」

A weird growl came from behind an object.

「Don't tell me—!?」

When Lux noticed, the thing already leaped at him.

「SHAAaAAAAH!」

A winged person made from a solid material attacked while letting out a piercing cry.

Lux barely used his sword as shield and blocked the first attack.

「Gargoyle!? Why here.....!」

The Automaton(La Cruche) said that the Abyss mostly shouldn't appear on the eighth floor and below. It was because originally it wasn't a place that should be protected.

For that reason Relie hurried ahead thinking that she could reach until the deepest level even without a Drag-Ride but—

(No, right now isn't the time to think about that!)

Lux instantly erased his various thoughts and poured his concentration to the battle in front of him.

He destroyed the second attack toward his Wyvern with the Scale Blade's Critical Hit.

「GUGAH, AAaAAH!」

The Gargoyle writhed when its sharp claw along with its right arm was pulverized.

But at the same time, even more enemy presences appeared as though they heard the scream.

There was a Chimera that he once witnessed together with Celis, a winged beast Gryphon, and also a squid type Abyss called Kraken.

There were more than ten enemies just from what he could see.

The Abyss were taking a formation that surrounded him in this place where there was little cover.

(This is bad, at this rate—)

Although Lux was used to fighting the Abyss, this situation was still overwhelmingly disadvantageous for him.

He could face them down if he switched his Drag-Ride into Bahamut!

「SHAaAAAAH!」

The Gargoyle roared and it was about to attack Lux once more, it was then—

• DOON!*

Dazzling flash ran through empty air and hit the Gargoyle.

「GA, aAAAAH!」

Its dying scream was drowned by an explosive sound. It scattered black fragments and vanished.

The canon attack that was fired from behind Lux pierced the one armed Gargoyle.

「As always, you are a forceful guy huh.」

「—Eh?」

Lux's eyes opened wide in surprise and he turned his gaze to the surrounding.

At that time, large type Abyss that were waiting for the chance to attack had their bodies frozen one after another.

「I understand that you're feeling impatient, but it's putting the cart before the horse if you're defeated.」

When Lux turned toward the voice from behind him, he found the figure of Lisha and Krulcifer there wearing Tiamat and Fafnir.

Without even any time to let out any word in surprise, lightning ran in the surroundings and turned the frozen Abyss into ash one after another.

「The headmaster is like that, but you too are also really rash. I conclude that a lecture is needed when we get back.」

Celis, who was wearing the Divine Drag-Ride of lightning, Lindwurm, told Lux that in exasperation.

「It appears that the headmaster is going ahead until the tenth floor. From the reaction, La Cruche is also beside her. The Abyss are approaching them from the surroundings. It's better to hurry if you want to chase them.」

Noct said from behind while confirming with her Drake's radar.

「Aah but, a lot of enemies are coming down to this area, so Lux-chi, you can just leave this to us! Ah, you can pay us back for this later on!」

「Well, putting aside Tillfur, those three Divine Drag-Ride users are really something, so leave this place to us, lad.」

「Uwah, meanie! Even though I'm enduring my fear like this!」

Hearing Sharis's words, Tillfur showed her actual feeling and acted flustered.

It seemed that everyone gathered here because they noticed Lux's objective.

However,

「Why is everyone, doing this—」

「I told everyone.」

- step*, A small walking sound echoed and a small statured girl walked forward.

The girl wearing a school uniform was Airi.

「I accidentally listened to Nii-san and the headmaster's talk. After hearing that, it's simple to predict how Nii-san will act so—」

Saying that, Airi looked up towards Lux with a slightly anxious face.

「Nii-san is going to save Philuffy-san right? No matter what.」

「.....Yes.」

「Then, let's start. Doing it with everyone should have a higher chance of success. Surely—」

「Airi, please be careful. It's enemy reinforcements.」

Noct raised a tensed voice, at the same time everyone stood ready.

「Lux. Go quickly! We will take care of these guys!」

Right after Lisha raised her voice, Krulcifer also sent a dragon voice that was transmitted to only Lux.

『We're going to catch up soon. I think that my authentication might be necessary to open the door to the deepest level. For now, go on ahead to the headmaster—』

「Yes!」

Lux replied while flying his Wyvern at the same time.

「Everyone, thank you.」

Lux said his thanks to everyone who gathered here and rushed through the passage at full speed.

Lux thought while going straight through the remaining floors at high speed.

Even though he intended to not involve them, in the end he made them to fuss about him needlessly instead.

Even though there should be no time for them to hear about the details from Airi, even so everyone rushed to help him.

He felt a mysterious feeling.

The thing that he couldn't obtain all this time since that day when he was a child.

Perhaps this time for sure he would obtain irreplaceable comrades that he could trust.

And then, even now Lux was scared that those comrades would abandon him, or perhaps he would lose them because of his fault.

That was something that didn't change since that day where he harbored doubt towards the Old EmpireThat Country.

(But—!)

There was already no time for hesitation.

The time in his childhood where he couldn't do anything.

And then, on the day of the revolution five years ago when he was betrayed and failed.

His current answer would come out after this.

Passing through the scenery that was flowing at high speed past him, Lux resolved himself, at that moment,

「—Relie-san!」

He saw it.

「.....Lux-kun-!？」

He overtook Relie who was together with La Cruche and intercepted the beast type Abyss that was standing in their way.

「Uo, OaaAAAAH!」

The Abyss that was called Werewolf received the Critical Hit from the Scale Blade and its upper body was blown away.

After confirming the Abyss's death, Lux walked towards Relie who was falling on her knees.

「Are you all right? Is anywhere hurt—?」

「How, did you know I came here—? No, rather than that.....even you.」

Relie opened her eyes in blank amazement while whispering.

「Yes. I'll also save Philuffy. No matter what, for sure.」

「Is that so.....」

Relie made a frail smile hearing Lux's words and she averted her gaze.

「.....But, something like that, actually might not exist. Something like a way to save that girl, actually it's nowhere to be..... Even so—I」

A voice that was filled with emptiness was squeezed out from Relie's lungs.

She used every way available in order to save her beloved little sister, then she realized that everything she did was for naught.

Even so, she couldn't give up.

Inside those words, there was the suffering of someone who continued to fight loneliness.

「It will be fine. Surely, we will manage somehow.」

「.....」

Even so, Lux didn't take back the hand he offered and formed his words strongly.

「Besides I promised her, that this time for sure, I'll absolutely save her—」

Relie looked down hearing Lux's voice that was filled with conviction.

But, this time she took Lux's hand and stood up.

「I'm sorry for dragging you into this. —But, thank you.」

Relie wiped her eyes that were blotted with tears and silently stood up.

「Sorry to keep you waiting. Let's hurry.」

Relie tensed her expression and turned her gaze toward her side. There La Cruche was smiling.

「I read the mood and stayed quiet. I'm a good child.」

「Ah, isn't that right.....」

Lux responded with a wry smile.

While no more Abyss came, they went down until the deepest level of eleventh floor. It was then Lisha and the others caught up from behind.

「Master. Please touch the crest of the door and think silently. The door of the deepest part will open after that.」

「—I understand.」

Krulcifer took a deep breath, then she walked towards the huge door.

At that time Lux whispered into the ear of Airi who was standing beside him.

「Airi, do you bring the horn flute?」

「Yes. I'm carrying it close to my person though—」

「Then I have a request. If the situation becomes like what I predicted, I want you to use it.」

When Lux began telling Airi about 『that plan』, Krulcifer's hand was held out towards the door.

The moment her hand touched, several streaks of blue lightning ran on the surface of the door.

「-.....!?」

Krulcifer leaked out a small moan from feeling a stimulus that felt like pain. Countless shining letters were emerging on the smooth surface of the door and it began to open.

「The authentication of Xfer is confirmed.....connection complete. There is also no problem with the usage restriction. Unlocking is possible with mind control operation.」

The inorganic artificial voice could be heard. Bewilderment appeared on Relie's face.

「What happened? Krulcifer-san, you are.....!?」

「I'll explain later. If we are still safe at that time—」

Krulcifer closed her eyes with her hand still on the door and she concentrated.

And then the door rumbled and a strange vibration was transmitted through her hand, after that,

- GASHIIIIIN!*

The door opened to four directions like flower petals along with heavy metallic sounds.

An unimaginable sight was spreading there.

「Is this.....the deepest level!?」

It was a vast dome shaped space that was surrounded with hard metallic walls.

That place which was illuminated by a light source overhead looked like the colosseum of the ancient era.

「.....Is this place really the deepest level, La Cruche?」

Celis's question was only natural.

Their image regarding the Ruin's deepest level was a huge treasure warehouse.

And yet, to not mention ancient texts or tools of the ancient era, not even a

part of a Drag-Ride could be found here.

When they had walked until nearly the center of the space, Relie watched the back of La Cruche with an expression that was a mix of bewilderment and anxiety.

「Is there some kind of mistake? Could it be, that your memory restoration failed—?」

「That's not true.」

La Cruche walked ahead. She then twirled around that caused her dress to flutter before answering.

Her height only reached until Lux's waist. She was a lovely girl that looked like a little girl.

He didn't notice until now how the look of her eyes was covered with a dark shadow.

「My memory restoration was a success. I remember everything. The thing that I should do is—」

La Cruche smiled and lifted her hand.

It was the smile of a predator that caught its prey inside a trap.

「—getting rid of all of you, leaving not a single one alive.」

A shudder ran through Lux and everyone else. In that instant, the thick door behind them closed swiftly.

「Wha-.....!?」

When everyone turned around, it was already too late.

The thick last door was firmly closed. In front of it there were the silhouettes of two figures wearing black robes.

「What are you doing? Listen to what I'm saying as the supervisor—」

When Krulcifer was questioning her in panic, La Cruche bowed courteously.

「Master. I have the obligation to listen to your orders. But that is not the top priority of the current me. As the Gear Leader of the Ark, I have to eliminate all

of you, the family of the rebel who betrayed and overthrew my masters then invaded this place, and his comrades—」

La Cruche glared at Lux with naked animosity filling her gaze.

Several scenes were resurrected in Lux's mind seeing that gaze.

The inside of the ship that was destroyed and fell into ruin that they saw right after entering the Ruin.

And then, the Ragnarok that appeared from the Ruin, Poseidon.

Fresh traces of destruction that weren't from the war of the ancient era, which appeared to come from the invasion of the Old Empire ten-odd years ago.

Did La Cruche traced back that memory, and because of that she considered Lux who had the same features as her opponent?

(But—a family of the rebel.....she said, what does she mean? Is there someone else other than me and the imperial family?) He didn't understand.

Lux had no way of knowing about the truth of the Old Empire that had continued for several hundred years.

But, the footsteps of two people approaching from behind pulled Lux back to reality.

What existed ahead of his gaze when he turned around were two figures clad in robes.

The figure walking at the front pulled off her hood and showed her face.

It was a girl with shining silver hair and asymmetrically colored eyes—Hayes.

「The negotiation broke down huh, prince. No, you were moving like an idiot and carried out my objective just like I planned, so perhaps I ought to say thanks to you instead?」

「You—!？」

Lux who confirmed her identity muttered with a groan.

Why did the girl who told him to open the door in the afternoon was here?

That she specified the time period and told him that he had to follow it was a trap.

Although he was threatened, Lux and the others should have resistance of being made to open the last door just as Hayes ordered.

Hayes saw through that. She saw Lux and the others were moving in the night and grasped their side's movement.

「You are on the wanted list of the New Kingdom. Prepare your—」

「Celis-senpai!」

Celis who confirmed Hayes's existence faster than others assaulted with Lindwurm.

She unleashed a stab of her special armament the large spear, <Lightning Lance> at high speed. —But,

- BASHIIN!*

「Wha-.....!？」

Celis unleashed a lunge with her large spear through the shortest motion, but her eyes opened wide in shock.

The other robed figure stood in front of Hayes faster than the tip of the spear could hit.

The spear was blocked.

The attack of the lance that could pierce an Abyss and destroy even fellow Drag-Rides without difficulty was stopped by a slender robed human.

The robe fluttered, the figure didn't overlook the opening when Celis stiffened because of the hard to believe reality.

- DOGUH!*

「Kuh.....!」

Celis retreated for ten-odd mel from receiving the punch attack.

Celis had quickly strengthened the output of her barrier to block the punch,

but the flow of her offense was completely severed.

「As expected from the honor student's leader, even your surprise attack is beautiful. Just discharge your specialty electric attack and burn your cute junior black already.」

「You are, don't tell me—?」

Celis didn't respond to Hayes's provocation and focused instead on the hooded figure before her eyes.

The figure threw away the robe that was turned into scrap rags from the impact which made clear her identity.

「Phi, luffy.....?」

Lux muttered reflexively.

「Wh, y.....」

Relie was also dumbfounded and stood still in place. The remaining members were also speechless from the revelation.

His childhood friend's expression looked hollow and shadowed.

「.....」

Philuffy who should be waiting in the boardinghouse for their return was right there.

「Why is that natural airhead here!? Besides—」

「Aa, I forgot to say, but if this woman continues to oppose the order of Yggdrasil, the Ragnarok that I'm controlling, she will die. But see, it's also possible to give powerful order signals that leave no room for opposition and make her listen if Yggdrasil devotes its strength for that.」

Lux sent a sharp gaze at Hayes who was talking with a ridiculing tone.

「.....So you mean, that you were toying with us right from the start?」

「You only noticed it this late? Is what I want to say but—this is also within my calculation. Everything, including toying with you guys is nothing more than a part of it. Well no matter, I'm grateful that you opened this door for me you know?」

Hayes walked with brisk footsteps that echoed on the metal floor. She passed through the sides of Lux and the others and headed to inside from the center.

It was the best chance to strike at her, but because Philuffy was following closely behind her, they couldn't move.

A huge crystal the size of a human head was being held under Hayes's arm.

「Now then, from here on just me alone will be sufficient. Thanks for your hard work, false prince and his hangers-on.」

The moment Hayes lifted up her hand toward the wall surface, the wall moved like puzzle pieces and she entered inside.

「You guys must be coming here a step ahead planning to outwit me, but your expectations missed. After all, your shallow thinking is like an open book for me.」

Before the door of the strange room closed, Hayes looked back and laughed.

「But, it's fine right? Your childhood friend is a wonderful girl. Originally it's hard to find a body that Yggdrasil's Ratatoskr can adapt to—but she showed the greatest adaptability, she is an excellent monster. Even though she should be really usable as battle strength, but you didn't notice anything, and her big sister the headmaster also only kept her hidden.」

「.....」

Lux who heard that clenched his fist tightly.

「That's why you are a complete failure. You don't use a useful pawn, you don't understand the way to use people. As someone who is similarly standing at the top I'll give you a lesson—about how to use a useful pawn!」

Hayes opened both her eyes wide in a flash and took out a horn flute from her pocket.

It was the Origin Variety horn flute that Fugil said was controlling the Ragnarok.

She put it on her mouth and strongly blew into it.

「Philuffy Aingram! Exterminate the all the low born there! When you finished

with that, you can be free you know, HAHAHAHA!』

Right after that gyrating noise, a commanding voice echoed inside the dome.

And then Hayes vanished behind the door along with a callous laugh.

『That damned low-life.....! Giving such command—』

Lisha gritted her teeth hard while groaning.

Lux and also everyone else understood the meaning of that evil command.

In the case that everyone there couldn't kill Philuffy and she killed everyone instead, then surely Philuffy too would commit suicide after that.

It was Hayes's evil design that was anticipating until that far.

『Nothing will begin even if we complain. Can the door to outside be opened?』

With a conflicted face, Celis looked towards Krulcifer beside her.

『I don't know. But—』

『I won't let you, master. In any case, if I the Gear Leader don't cooperate, you all won't be able to get out from here.』

La Cruche stood in their way and she waved her finger lightly like a conductor baton.

Instantly three Drag Rides came down before Lux's eyes along with a faint light.

『This is—!?』

『Start On』

The three Wyvern deployed at the same time as La Cruche's shout.

But, the Drag-Rides didn't have any human piloting it.

In exchange there was strange puppet made from metal placed in them.

『That's—!? Puppet!? Something like unmanned Drag-Rides, I've never even heard—』

Lisha raised a bewildered voice. At the same time those three Drag-Rides

brandished a large blade and flew towards Lux.

「-.....！」

Lux who was wearing Wyvern immediately blocked with his blade.

At the same time when the battle began, there was a small sound of blade being unsheathed from behind him.

Philuffy was pulling out her short sword type Sword Device with a shining pair of eyes.

She readied the sword before her eyes and quickly spoke the passcode.

「—Activate. The star breaker, the end piercer, godslaying giant dragon. Release the fangs of a hundred heads and kill the almighty, Typhon.」

It was an empty and dark voice that was completely different from the usual Philuffy.

And then, her face that was tinged with crazed delight gave fear to everyone there.

Should they persuade her? Take shelter? Or restrain her?

A huge violet dragon was summoned and connected to the summoner, snatching even the time to feel hesitation.

Philuffy's golden pupils shined, red patterns were emerging on her skin. She took her stance while smiling.

The selection members with Celis at the lead faced her from the front. Their expressions tensed.

「Celis-san..... Philuffy is.....」

「Yes, I understand.」

Celis gave a small nod towards Relie's pleading. She then looked towards Krulcifer and the others behind her.

「Everyone! We will restrain her. Then as soon as we succeed doing that, we will reinforce Lux.」

「Yes!」

Lisha and others nodded wearing their Drag-Rides. At the same time Philuffy's Typhon skated forward.

Part 5

「Kuh.....！」

Lux moved to the position of the wall where Hayes vanished while fighting the three Drag-Rides.

Fortunately the unmanned Drag-Rides weren't that strong.

But, their movement patterns were clearly different from humans. Their movements were hard to read.

「How long are you planning to run away?」

La Cruche asked with a robotic tone that was unique to a puppet mixed with a sadistic smile.

Most likely she was controlling the Drag-Rides using her thought in place of pilots.

「It looks like you are getting pushed back, but you still have composure. Are you not defeating them because you are waiting for the chance to bring them down with certainty?」

「.....」

Lux didn't answer La Cruche's question.

If he got serious then he could destroy his opponents with Critical Hit, but if he did that there was the possibility that La Cruche would call for fresh reinforcements.

「I see, you are quite clever. You are pretending to avoid your opponent's attacks continuously—while aiming at me.」

Lux shook off the unmanned Drag-Rides. Then when he fixed his aim at La Cruche, 「—But, that's your fatal mistake.」

- bachi-.....!*

「-.....!？」

The Wyverns that he had completely dodged until now shined and accelerated.

The three Drag-Rides made a strange noise like creaking metal and they swung down their large sword.

「Nii-san-!？」

When Airi's voice resounded in the surroundings, the blades from the three smashed the solid floor.

「This movement—!？」

Lux barely reacted and dodged, but he was amazed with the three Drag-Rides.

Their driving force was clearly different from the performance of a normal Wyvern.

Was that because they were controlled by La Cruche and not by human hands, no—

「Did you misread? Or else, did you not understand? The true form of these Drag-Rides—」

Right after that, light flickered and countless letters and images that looked like small windows were floating around La Cruche.

The three Wyverns were also tinged with light as though in alignment. The string of letters shined faintly orange and flowed from above to below in high speed.

- bashun!* Countless frame parts changed construction and their lock was taken off.

「That's, don't tell me—!」

Lisha who saw that from a distance raised an amazed voice. La Cruche muttered at that time.

「Release all safety devices. Maximum output—<Over LimitLimit Break>」

Instantly, all the floating letter strings vanished and the three Wyverns shined.

Bluish white beams of light wrapped around them like vapor, right after that, 「Sayonara.」

The unmanned Wyverns La Cruche controlled broke the sound barrier.

「Kuh.....!」

It was high speed movement that was incomparable with everything until now.

Blades of large swords were swung down, surpassing every estimation of movement range limit.

The dagger and barrier that Lux reflexively prepared were severed without difficulty, and his neck was assaulted.

The slash that came flying with speed that the naked eye couldn't follow was about to cut Lux's neck altogether with his barrier, it was then,

- GIIN!* Lux repelled the slash with the blade his other hand was equipping.

「Hee.....?」

- clang* A part of his armor that was cut diagonally fell on the floor.

「Ku.....!？」

Lux had instantly touched the handle of his Sword Device and activated Quick Draw.

It was a hidden technique that used perfect alignment of body control operation and mind control operation to execute only a single action with godpseed.

Lux used that technique reflexively, matched the sword and barely avoided a direct hit to himself.

「It's amazing that you could avoid that. For someone to survive it on the first time seeing it, it's the first in my memory.」

La Cruche smiled with an admiring voice.

At that moment, fresh blood splattered from Lux's shoulder.

「Lux-kun!」

Relie screamed. Lux's face grimaced a bit and he backed away.

「Lux. Are you okay—!? Uah!?!」

Lisha who was wearing Tiamat was caught by the Pile Anchor that Typhon fired from the side and she was sent flying.

Celis, Lisha, Krulcifer, and the Triad, a total of six Drag-Knights were facing Philuffy simultaneously. And yet Philuffy was more than a match against them.

「It can't be helped. Let's give her a shock temporarily to dispel her Drag-Ride, then subdue her!」

Celis who saw their unfavorable situation gave instruction to everyone.

They held back their attack in consideration to Philuffy's body, but such leeway was gone.

「Then, I'll start.」

Krulcifer nodded in response, immediately after that she flew her Fafnir and moved above Typhon.

Originally she was more suited to support from long range with precision sniping in conjunction with her comrade's cooperation, but she dared instead to approach near in order to read the movement of Philuffy who was controlling her Drag-Ride peculiarly.

「—Wise BloodWisdom of Fortune Calamity」

She activated the Divine Raiment that Fafnir possessed.

With the ability of future prediction activated, she looked for an opening in Typhon.

At the same time Lisha flew high above and activated the Divine Raiment of gravity load, SuppressorHeavenly Voice.

Then at the end Celis activated Divine GateRuler's Sanctuary and instantly

took the stance to shift into offence. It was at that moment, 「—<Missing FaithFruit of Heartlessness>」

Philuffy whispered with shining golden pupils.

Right after that, the whole body of Typhon shined faintly and its Divine Raiment activated.

- GAUuuUUUUUUNN!*

Instantly jet black wave motion was generated with Typhon as the center, spreading outward in a spherical shape.

The three girls put up their guard thinking that it might be a type of shockwave. When the wave reached them, the gravity load of Suppressor disappeared.

「Wha-.....!？」

「Too, slow.」

Not letting go of the opening when Lisha's body stiffened from surprise, Philuffy fired Pile Anchor from the ground. The tip that was modeled after the jaw of a large snake snapped at the right arm part. Typhon then ran at high speed on the floor and pulled Tiamat before throwing it towards the wall.

The aim of the throw was toward Krulcifer who was also in midair.

「-.....!？」

Krulcifer who was aiming to snipe with her special armament, the gun of freezing bullet—Freezing CannonFrozen Breath Projectile, couldn't evade Tiamat that was approaching before her eyes.

「Why, did my foresight vanish—!？」

The two Drag-Rides collided before she could grasp the answer and they were sent flying to the back.

「Why is this..... My Divine Gate's teleport barrier is.....!」

Lindwurm's Divine Raiment could do instant teleportation within a fixed distance.

A domain of light was deployed in order to create that teleportation range. That light was now dispersed without any trace behind.

Celis used her lance to barely block the huge arm of Typhon that was sent towards her—but, the electric attack that should be dealt to the enemy wasn't generated for some reason.

「Lindwurm's output is falling drastically. Don't tell me, this is—」

「Be careful! Philuffy right now can use Typhon's Divine Raiment! It neutralizes the Divine Raiment of other Drag-Rides and also lowers their performance—」

「Ku.....!」

Everyone who heard Relie's voice was shaken and nervous.

Until now Philuffy had never used Typhon's Divine Raiment that was called Missing Faith in a real battle.

The reason was because of the problem of concentration and burden.

Because Philuffy was performing a special movement that was called martial arts using a Drag Ride, the majority of her concentration was poured into Drag-Ride control.

Therefore, if she used her Divine Raiment that demanded powerful concentration at the same time, the burden would be too large for her and her Drag-Ride would rampage.

That was why, she was unable to use it skillfully and she also had no intention of using it in a real battle in the future.

According to Relie that was what Philuffy told her.

That was why until now no one had witnessed the might of that Divine Raiment that ought to be called as anti Divine Drag-Ride specialist, but, 「So this is, because of the Abyss's power.....」

Lisha muttered along with a bitter expression.

Even Philuffy's brain function was improved by the strengthening of

Yggdrasil's Ratatoskr.

That Philuffy became able to use her Divine Raiment must be because of that.

「At this rate, we won't have any chance of victory.....」

Noct who was guarding Airi and Relie using her Drake whispered in a daze, it was then that Airi slowly put her horn flute inside her pocket.

In exchange she took out a pocket watch and watched its second hand as though praying. It was then that the door at the inner part opened.

「.....Haa, so it's still not over yet here. Troublesome.」

Hayes who was showing a fearless smile slowly stepped out from inside.

Most likely she had already finished with what she was doing at the innermost room.

「I also want to play around a bit more, but it's not like I got a lot of free time. I also finished using Grand Force, I gotta go soon. I'll give the command to that woman through Yggdrasil to strengthen her until she becomes ash!」

「Stop it! Please!」

Relie yelled when she saw Hayes taking out her horn flute once more.

Hayes who saw that responded with a wide smile.

「Now, get serious monster! Fight until you die, make those guys—!」

The thinly smiling Hayes's face stiffened.

「LordCreator-sama!」

The moment La Cruche raised her voice in panic, a Pile Anchor was fired from Typhon with speed like a bullet.

「.....!」

Because there was quite a distance in between, Hayes managed to dodge at a hair's breadth.

But,

「Why.....!」

- PAKIIN!*

The Origin Variety horn flute in Hayes's hand was smashed apart and golden fragments danced in the air.

High-pitched sound resounded inside the dome and time stopped for just a few seconds.

「U, aa.....」

Right after that, Philuffy's eyes suddenly closed and the red pattern vanished from her whole body.

And then Typhon's armor was dispelled and she collapsed limply on the ground.

「Philuffy.....-!」

Relie who ran close to her caught her body firmly.

「—What's this!? How could she go against the order Yggdrasil gave—」

Smile vanished from the face of Hayes who saw that.

When Lux turned his face towards that voice with bottomless darkness and cold anger, 「It's something like this.」

Some distance away Airi held up the horn flute she held.

The horn flute that was possessed by the Captain of the Rebel Army's leader Velvet, and which later on was managed by the academy.

「—How did you son of a bitch know how to use that?」

Airi faltered for a moment when a gaze filled with hatred was directed towards her.

But, the Triad members stood in front of her to protect her, so Airi tightened her expression.

「You didn't notice? Something like your stupid scheme, it had been seen through by us—by Nii-san right from the beginning.」

「.....」

Hayes smiled once more in response to Airi's resolute expression and voice.

「I see..... so it was seen through. By temporarily erasing the command given by the Abyss or the Ragnarok using the horn flute——」

The effect of the flute that controlled the Abyss only worked within a certain time after its user played it.

They confirmed the sound of the horn flute repeatedly used when the Abyss attacked was because of that.

If the horn flute could put an Abyss under a human's control permanently after playing it one time, they wouldn't hear the flute's sound that often from nearby.

As for the way to use the flute, Airi deciphered the ancient text from the Ruin of the Garden that Krulcifer opened, and when they came to this Ruin, Airi had tested it several times.

Therefore, it could be predicted that even the 『command』 given to Philuffy would wear off as time went on.

Hayes purposefully trying to play the horn flute once more was because of that.

Therefore, Airi took advantage of that opening where the command had cut off, played the flute in between the battle, and gave Philuffy a new command. That was the instruction that Lux gave to her.

The command was 『Dispel your armor and fall asleep』.

「—Manifest, the violent dragon that devours the gods' flesh and blood. Sever the sky of dark clouds, Bahamut!」

When Hayes was taken by surprise, La Cruche turned the three Wyverns into defense in order to protect her lord Hayes. Lux switched Drag-Rides at that moment.

Lux who was clad in the violent black dragon that was the symbol of destruction rushed in for a counterattack and divided apart the three Wyverns right away.

「——」

「It's only you and that piece of junk puppet left. Are you prepared?」

Lisha who had rallied herself and landed down pointed her Sword Device towards the two.

「I guess. It looks like you possess a strange authority in this Ruin, but the distance is too far to run away from here to outside. —You've dug your own grave here.」

Krulcifer also landed quietly from behind.

「It's over already for you. If you surrender we'll at least guarantee your life. There'll be no mercy if you refuse. We'll execute you here together with that Automata too. This is your last warning—arms dealer Hayes.」

At the end Celis pointed the tip of her lance to Hayes and declared so.

「—Fuh. Fufufufufu」

Surrounded by Syvalles, a small voice leaked out from the mouth of the looking down Hayes.

It wasn't her usual foul-mouthed tone that sounded like a man, but a voice that was appropriate for a girl her age.

Dark shadows dwelled around Hayes's eyes and her expression changed.

And then, her hand took a small gem that was inside the broken horn flute and she lifted her face.

「The last warning you say? So you haven't noticed yet, these fools.」

Instantly, the Dome's ceiling cracked.

「The one who fell into a trap—was you all.」

And then, a strange giant tree with dark red veins running on its surface fell down from the ceiling.

「Don't tell me, this thing is—!?」

「One of the Ragnarok, Yggdrasil.....!?」

The Ragnarok that was the main culprit who tormented Philuffy following Hayes's order.

That thing appeared as though to blanket the vast dome.

「It's true that I cannot give out any new order to that woman. —But, as long as I'm holding the gem of the horn flute that was played last, this Ragnarok will protect the owner and destroy the enemy standing against it.」

Thick tree trunks with skull-like shadows on its surface was supported by countless roots creeping on the ground, it adjusted its stance like a single animal and roared.

EEEeEEeeEEEAOooOooOOOO!

A thunderous roar that human language couldn't comprehend shook the atmosphere like an electric shock.

「Kuh! Shut up, this—!」

Lisha immediately flew, and the moment she swung her Sword Device, —a flexible branch flew towards her like a whip.

「Ku, ah.....!?」

It sent flying the Legions Lisha were controlling and hit Tiamat several times.

Tiamat was blown away along with its barrier that should possess tough endurance.

「Lisha-sama!?」

The moment Lux called out, the giant tree trunk creaked and countless holes opened on it.

What showed up from those holes were countless gun muzzles.

They were tinged with the light of CannonDrag-Ride Breath Gun that was a Drag-Ride equipment and fired them all at once.

「Kuh.....!」

When Lux barely evaded them, blades grew from the countless tips of the branches and they were tinged with the same light as BladeDrag-Ride Fang Sword and attacked him further.

Lux used his large sword to sever the tentacles and blades that moved at speeds his eyes couldn't even follow.

Although he barely managed to at least defend against direct hit, he was pushed back by the force and then he got thrown backwards.

The slashes of the blades that were filled with energy would deal lethal wound if he mistakened how to block them.

The advantage of that being the only weapon that could win against the Abyss was now possessed by the enemy too.

「How can a Ragnarok, use Drag-Ride armaments—」

After Krulcifer whispered in amazement, Hayes's ridiculing laugh resounded.

「I'll teach you something good. Yggdrasil's basic ability is controlling and strengthening through its parasites. It works on both organic and inorganic matter. I made it eat several dozen general-purpose Drag-Rides and armaments. In other words—you get it already?」

「.....」

Lux and the others were at lost for words, at the same time that tree trunk and branches moved, and they could see countless iron lump wriggling from inside the dark red surface.

It wasn't merely just a powerful monster.

This main body of Yggdrasil was able to incorporate all the Drag-Ride's abilities and armaments and controlled them like its own limbs.

What's more, it controlled them with the number and power several dozen times that of a normal Drag-Ride.

When Krulcifer fired the bullet of light of her RifleSniping Dragon Gun, a barrier emerged instantly from its surface and repelled the bullet.

「Looks like it's also meaningless to simply aim and shot it.....」

「It's futile! The attack of the likes of you all won't work against this guy!」

Yggdrasil moved at the same time as Hayes's insult.

The air in the surroundings whirled and a tremendous shockwave burst out.

Howling Howl.

Perhaps because the number of Force Cores that generated the shockwave was off by a digit, it caused a storm that swept over not just its surrounding but the whole room.

Several hundred Daggers grew from the tip of its branches like leaves and poured down like rain to further strike everyone who lost their balance.

A mortal combat against Yggdrasil that had been turned into a Drag-Ride fortress began.

「That's a terrifying opponent. But—! We cannot lose!」

Celis didn't even flinch against the difference in strength that was despairing even from a glance and she raised up her spirit.

Following after her who took the role as vanguard, Lisha and Krulcifer also threw their bodies into the battlefield.

Against the overwhelming number of attacks and the might of the Ragnarok that was said to be able to destroy even a small country, the girls were devoting themselves to defensive evasions for a while.

「So this is a Ragnarok, I thought that it's unbeatable unless we use the whole force of the New Kingdom but—it's a total disappointment!」

After a few minutes passed, the flow of battle suddenly began to change.

Lisha who was starting to grasp the enemy's movement gradually controlled her Legions, while conversely she dodged the whipping branches the enemy stretched out and the armaments it fired.

The moment she finally entered the enemy's space, she activated her Divine Raiment.

「Prostrate under the name of god! Suppressor!」

The moment Lisha pointed at the grotesque giant tree with her Sword Device, a wide range gravitational field was generated and the trunk creaked.

Her objective wasn't just to seal the enemy's movement, she put super heavy pressure on it aiming to flatten it.

Countless branches made sounds and snapped off, while the many armaments loaded inside the trunk were creaking.

「GU, OooOOOOOOoOOOOH!」

Yggdrasil raised a roar that sounded like a scream.

But, there wasn't any sign that the essential part, the trunk would also snap.

「Do you think you can kill Yggdrasil with just that much?」

Hayes that was inside a cage made from countless branches muttered mockingly.

But,

「Naturally, no one here think so.」

Krulcifer answered while at the same time she pulled the trigger of her Freezing Cannon.

「The endurance contest is starting from here you know?」

Her aim was the countless Force Cores that moved the great amount of armaments loaded inside its trunk and branches.

She froze every part where the Force Cores were loaded, then used normal bullet of light to shot through them one after another, destroying them.

That amazing accuracy and speed caused splinters to scatter in succession.

Due to the Force Cores' destruction, Yggdrasil's main method of offense was drastically reduced.

The remained offense method for it was hitting or stabbing with its branches, and also using the horn growing from the skull on its trunk part.

「With this we can finally—attack the main body's core.」

Celis muttered. She evaded the branches that stretched toward her in counterattack using Divine Gate and teleported right before Yggdrasil.

「You made light of humans, Ragnarok.」

And then, she fired the light bullet of wide range bombing, <Starlight Zero>.

「oooOOOAAA!」

After a few seconds, light and shockwave burst out inside Yggdrasil's mouth.

Even the dome shook. When the violent explosion blast stopped, there was Yggdrasil that snapped from its burnt black trunk there.

「Fuu..... We somehow defeated it..... However, this kind of disgusting flesh tree cannot even become replacement for firewood.」

Lisha let out a breath in relieve. Seeing the burnt black Yggdrasil, she came down.

But, Celis and Krulcifer didn't let down their guard.

「It's still too fast to relax your attention. We have weakened it, but we cannot be relieved until we confirmed the destruction of its core. Without delay—」

「Yes, I'll foresight the enemy's movement one more time, so for now let's deal additional—」

Celis readied her lance, and in response Krulcifer put her hand on the armor part of her head, it was then, 「Aa—a, it's boring.」

The despondent voice of Hayes echoed inside the dome.

「Even though I thought that you guys will let your guard down and got done in instantly.」

- GOO-!*

「-.....!？」

At the same time with Hayes's whisper, new branches extended out from inside the burnt trunk with speed that the eye couldn't even follow.

Fafnir avoided getting pierced by a hair's breadth, but several other branches that came after that hit Fafnir hard and knocked it down.

「Krulcifer! Kuh.....this thing!」

「Lizsharte. The gravity load!」

「I know even without you telling me! Suppressor!」

Urged by Celis, Lisha attempted to stop Yggdrasil's movement with gravitational field at maximum output once more. But—

「What-!？」

The countless branches that were snapped before this now endured with only bending lightly from the gravity effect. Then they sent Lisha's Tiamat flying.

Without pause she collided on the wall at the back. At that moment Celis deployed Divine Gate and circled around Yggdrasil's back.

Right after she carried out the instantaneous teleportation, she stabbed her lance with the shortest motion—but, it was as though her movement had been predicted, a whipping branch quickly flew and struck Lindwurm hard.

「Ku, ah.....！」

The flow of battle completely changed for the three. After their offensive, they were now struck down in the blink of an eye.

Krulcifer only barely managed to stand up. She fired at the branches' joint with her Freezing Cannon, but the spot she fired at only scattered ice beads to the surroundings and didn't freeze.

「It doesn't freeze.....!? Why!? Before this it certainly—」

Lisha who rallied herself passed through beside the shaken Krulcifer and let her Legion flew.

All the bullets that the Legions fired without aiming were flicked off by the countless branches without difficulty.

「Wha-.....!? —It's not just the Divine Raiment! Even special armament also became ineffective.....! Don't tell me, this thing—」

Everyone there who saw that sight felt a shuddering sensation, it was then, 「Hahahaha! Thanks a lot you guys. It's just as planned—you guys made Yggdrasil strong for me.」

The high-pitched loud laughter came from Hayes who was watching the battle.

「Defeating the Ragnarok you said? Don't tell me that you guys seriously thought that its ability is just high-speed regeneration and parasitic ability?」

Hayes laughed while toying with the jewel inside her hand.

「I'll tell you something good. The greatest ability that is only possessed by Yggdrasil's main body is『high-speed reinforcement』. If it gets attacked it will prepare resistance against that attack, it will also surpass the opponent in speed and power. It will evolve in the middle of battle and become strong endlessly.」

「.....」

Everyone trembled with fear hearing that terrifying declaration.

「Well, although I said that, it has a limit more or less. Even though it can regenerate and reinforce itself, it will be over for it if its life force runs out, but unfortunately it won't turn out like that no matter how many attacks it received. The reason is—I already made it devour several hundred Abyss in this Ruin's manufacture area for its life force stock.」

「.....Don't tell me, that there was almost no Abyss coming out in this Ruin until midway was because—」

Celis stood up and whispered with a trembling voice.

「That's right. I used the usable facility of the manufacture area and devoted myself in storing life force for Yggdrasil. I overlooked you bunch of insipid girls until you arrived here was also all for the preparation period for this.」

「You're really loose lipped for someone who introduced herself as Heiburg's strategist.」

Krulcifer stood up and sent a cold gaze at Hayes.

「You will regret it if you get cocky and talk too much you know? When you lose that is.」

「.....What enviable people. Not knowing anything is really happiness.」

Hayes snorted in response to Krulcifer's words and shrugged.

「You guys already lost by the time you came here and fell into my plan! But, do your best to fight back! And then become food for Yggdrasil!」

The giant tree began to move once more along with that declaration.

Lisha and the others also desperately fought back, but their every single move was surpassed.

And then— finally Tiamat's armor was dispelled because of excessive damage.

「U, aa.....!」

「Lisha-sama-!？」

Lux repelled the countless stretching branches while rushing toward Lisha's side.

He held her body and retreated to the rear.

He lowered down Lisha who was breathing hard from exhaustion. At the same time Lux spoke.

「Lisha-sama. Please let me use it. The other power hidden inside Bahamut—」

「.....You, must not. It's dangerous to use that right now! We haven't tested it yet using Bahamut, and you are too exhausted already. If you force yourself here, you'll—」

「Please. We cannot lose here. I don't want it to turn out like that day five years ago!」

「.....」

That day five years ago—

The last day when the Old Empire perished and the palace fell.

Was Lisha also thinking back about that too?

「I'll have to send the code from my Chimeratech Wyrm to you. Also, hold out for a minute. If you do that, I'll send it to you for sure.」

Saying that, Lisha pulled out two Sword Devices.

「That's why, return back properly! Lux!」

「—I promise.」

Right after telling her that, Lux stood in front of Yggdrasil's way.

The remaining members were already wounded all over, they couldn't even fight.

「Now, you've resolved yourself, right, false prince.」

Hayes displayed a wicked smile. At that moment, dark red branches approached with speed several times faster than before.

But, from an inescapable situation, Lux's Bahamut cut the branches with speed that surpassed it.

One of the three hidden techniques, Quick Draw.

Lux let out a single flash with certainty, but against this powerful monster as the opponent, it couldn't hope to inflict a lethal wound.

(Then first—I'll expose its core!)

Lux slipped through the countless branches flying about and approached the main body that was the trunk.

At the same time, the right arm of the Drag-Ride that was holding a large sword began to make a strange sound.

It was a gyrating sound of creaking metal. In order to block Lux's path, several branches formed a defensive wall that looked like a spider's web. Then a single flash exploded out.

Recoil Burst.

It was the hidden technique that used both body control operation and mind control operation, by controlling them in opposite to each other instead of harmonizing them, it caused an intentional rampage.

The single attack that obtained the might of several dozen times a normal slash had broken apart countless branches, and gouged a large scar on the trunk.

(Did I do it? But, not yet—)

Although the giant tree was shaved, but it didn't reach so far that its core was exposed.

The burden from using Recoil Burst was great, but he could only gamble here.

Lux didn't let the chance to win escape and launched the finishing attack.

He swung his large sword, erased the opening that should have resulted when his action ended, and persisted to shower the enemy with rain of slashes one

after another without pause.

Infinitely continuing consecutive attacks, End ActionPerpetual Links.

He shook off the burden and fatigue that was gradually piling up in him and attempted to make his blade reach the core, it was then,

• GAKIN-!*

Such metallic sound echoed. Yggdrasil repelled the blade of the large sword he swung down.

「Wha—!？」

The moment the slash that he was about to unleash was stopped, Lux got hit consecutively by whips of branches and got blown away.

「Why!? Even though it shouldn't have been given time to even regenerate—」

Celis yelled from behind. Hayes laughed loudly to that.

「Idiot! You thought that Yggdrasil will croak just from a few hundred slashes!? This monster can evolve even while getting attacked! With this, your specialty hidden techniques whatever are all used up!」

Hayes who laughed scornfully got out from in the middle of the branches surrounding her and yelled.

「This is the end! You damn shitty prince pretending to be hero. I'll send that bunch idolizing you to death altogether—I'll also destroy the New Kingdom that you wished for. Anything and everything is all your fault! No matter how much you bluff and enumerate your ideal, in the end you cannot save anything. HAHAHAHAHAHA!」

Part 6

Lux was inside the darkness.

His surrounding was covered with countless dark red branches. His Drag-Ride was slowly constricted to smash it.

Yggdrasil was already surpassing the full power of Bahamut.

A sudden fatigue assaulted his whole body, it felt like his blood had become like mud.

Cold despair was invading Lux's thought and heart.

In order to oppose the fate that was the Old Empire's rule and accomplish his duty as a prince, he fought desperately.

(Even so, was it impossible no matter how much I did my best..... From the start I—)

『Someone who wasn't loved by anyone, will try to be loved by anyone.』

It was true.

He had no power or position to move the country.

He knew that he couldn't do anything, even so he wished to protect what was important to him and he began to fight that day.

The girl who he wanted to protect even at the cost of his life was snatched from him, the country that he tried to change followed the path of ruin.

Even though it would be fine as long as his important people were safe even if he had to use up his life.

(.....I, couldn't save anything)

Lux thought that something like the Black Hero was just a terrible irony.

He was merely scared.

He was scared that he would lose his important people, he was also scared that the people would turn into his enemies.

He feared, and feared.

He tried to fight that mighty empire.

He tried to accomplish his duty as a prince.

He was putting in so much effort that his body might break apart.

All of those, he was fighting only for the sake of continuing to run away from the malice haunting his heart.

It was just as she, Hayes said, surely—

「—That's, not it.」

「-.....!？」

Inside his fading consciousness, he could hear a girl's voice.

「Don't decide, about Lu-chan, when you don't know anything.」

It was a familiar voice. From a glance that voice sounded indifferent, however it was a straightforward voice, with strong will in it.

Inside the sleepiness where he didn't understand if he was even awake or living.

From the gaps of the branches enveloping him, he could see the girl's figure.

She had only just woken up, her breathing was also feeble, even so Philuffy gazed at Hayes at the opposite side and stood up.

「Because, I know. Even though Lu-chan is hurt, he tried to change this country. I know that. Even now he wants to know the feelings of everyone in the country, so he did many odd jobs. I also know that.」

And then, she continued to speak as though to talk to Lux inside the darkness.

「I know everything, that's why fight. Not for anyone else. But for the sake, of the wish Lu-chan desires—」

「——」

Instantly Lux was liberated from the sleepiness and he tightly gripped Bahamut's controller.

At the same time a dragon voice from Lisha's Chimeratech Wyrm was sent to him.

『Lux! Can you hear me!? I sent you the procedure to release the Drag-Ride's limit! Use it! The Over Limit!』

Instantly Lux's consciousness was detached from the real world and blacked out.

It was a world that enumerated strange numbers and letters where there were only him and his Drag-Ride in existence.

A scenery that Lux should have never seen before was occupying his field of vision.

—No, that's not it.

The release code that Lisha sent to him.

He certainly remembered, that release method.

His thought ran off by its own and overtook his self from the past up to the present.

If he remembered right, this was—

『Lux! What's wrong!? That's, what in the world—』

When he woke up in response to Lisha's yell, lights were floating at Bahamut's surroundings.

All the codes for the safety measures and output restrictions emerged and warning signals were displayed one after another.

Originally, the utmost concentration in addition to training for the sake of remembering the complicated procedure was needed to run the release code.

It was now unfolding with abnormal speed which surpassed the time when Lisha was doing it before.

He had already seen several times the release procedure where this should be his first time doing it.

Before La Cruche used the procedure of full release that ignored the burden limit because the user Drag-Knight was a puppet. Now Lux carried out the steps of that same procedure at high speed.

The mechanism of ability restriction that was used to protect the Drag-Knight, he released them all until the last one without leaving a single one.

「This is, what I showed just now. The procedure of maximum release of Over Limit—. Don't tell me, you remembered that!? From in the middle of the battle just now!?」

While La Cruche raised a shocked voice, even more letters and graphics made of light were unfolding.

They increased in number with accelerating speed, and the moment all the enumeration vanished, the suspended Bahamut activated.

「Impossible—!? How can, this guy.....!」

Hayes's expression twitched and her eyes snapped wide open.

That instant, light flashed and along with it, the branches covering Lux burst out and a transformation started.

「—Over Limit – On」

Right after Lux whispered, light particles gathered in the surrounding at high speed, and additional summons was executed on the armor that was emitting an ominous luster.

In the blink of an eye, new pair of wings and various parts connected and the shape of the huge dragon changed.

Both arms were attached with cartridge that was for high output flying mechanism and increasing the offense of the blade.

The dragon figure that expressed majesty uncovered its tyrannical true nature and accomplished a transformation into a fiendish form that was specialized for offense.

「This is, Bahamut's.....Over Limit.」

The moment everyone there including Lisha held their breath, red light burst up from under Bahamut's legs.

「oooooooooooooooooooooOOOOOO」

Yggdrasil roared as though responding to the appearance of a formidable enemy and attacked.

「Lux-kun! Be careful—」

Krulcifer yelled when she saw the dark red tentacle branches stretching out in countless number.

The great number of branches that had regenerated many times—were strengthened and endowed with steel-like endurance.

However,



• ZAGUU.....!*

A jet black slash line that split the space vertically instantly severed all those.

It was a single strike that didn't even use the Divine Raiment Reload on Fire or the hidden technique of Drag-Ride control.

Despite that, it could be confirmed from what just happened that the attack was endowed with both heaviness and speed that was incomparable from before.

「.....What the?」

Hayes reflexively frowned seeing that hard to believe sight, it was then—

「—Prepare yourself, Hayes.」

Lux who was wearing the awakened state of Bahamut proclaimed quietly.

「I won't, forgive you.」

It wasn't a threat or even recommendation to surrender.

Those eyes that were clad in bottomless coldness were directed to her.

「.....Fu」

Hayes almost flinched from that chilly pressure that was completely different from the usual Lux, but,

「—Just try it! You lowly false prince!」

Her expression immediately turned furious and she tightly grasped the gem inside her hand.

Due to its special characteristic of protecting the master that blew the horn, Yggdrasil's branches that were covering Hayes to protect her increased further, forming a solid protective wall.

At the same time Bahamut was clad in flickering light that looked like flames and flew.

「ooOOooOOOOooOOoOOOOOO.....!」

Yggdrasil roared with the appearance of a formidable enemy and met the huge dragon.

It created sharp spear tips with its branches to skewer the enemy.

It created branches with hammer-like tips to crush the enemy.

It opened its branches up and down like a beast's jaw and sent it forward to bite the enemy dead.

Devilish branches were sent forth, covering the whole field of vision.

The jet black streak ran every which way, dodging and cutting everything.

Finally Yggdrasil's main body, the trunk that had skull pattern on its surface had countless wounds carved on it.

The full strength of Yggdrasil that had grown until it surpassed even a Divine Drag-Ride was being completely excelled by Lux and Bahamut.

「What power..... Perhaps, if it's with this—」

Celis was looking for an opening while whispering towards that terrifying offense and defense that was beyond human understanding.

The great number of Yggdrasil's branches were rapidly diminishing and at this rate it seemed possible to overcome the Ragnarok.

But—

「.....!？」

- BASHIIN!*

The giant flesh tree that had its branches severed and its trunk pierced many times was starting to react gradually.

Although it still couldn't land a direct hit at Bahamut, but it was starting to follow Bahamut's movement, what's more it was even scraping off Bahamut's reinforced barrier.

「Fuh, fufufu.....what's the matter false prince? You are finished getting cocky already!？」

「Is it impossible even with that Bahamut.....」

Every aspect of Yggdrasil was starting to surpass Bahamut as though to make Lisha's words a reality.

「I told you already that you cannot win against this guy! Even if you use the awakened state of a Drag-Ride, its power would be several times the normal Drag-Ride at best. It doesn't have the power to finish with one blow my Yggdrasil—the monster that has eaten several hundred Abyss. Thanks a lot false prince. For making my Yggdrasil—into the strongest.」

Hayes's loud laughter resounded in the area.

「This is, already.....!」

Everyone, including Tillfur was starting to let out an air of pessimism.

Even the power of Bahamut that used Over Limit was being overwhelmed in attack speed.

They were already unable to even make a dent on the enemy no matter how hard they struggled with the battle strength they currently had in hand.

Something like a method to defeat the Ragnarok before them, it existed—nowhere.

While everyone present lost their voice in despair, only Lux kept focusing on the enemy before his eyes without even a single twitch in his eyebrow.

「Now! Get smashed into pieces and fall! You weakest ruined prince!」

Yggdrasil's trunk creaked at the same time with Hayes's bellow and the skull at the center opened its mouth gaping wide.

Silver horn grew from inside its mouth.

The greatest attack lengthening out with high speed was about to pierce Lux's Bahamut, it was at that moment that fierce red light rose up like flame pillars from that jet black armor.

「Reload on Fire.」

「Dumbass! Don't you get it that it's pointless!? It's useless no matter how strong you try to become! With your strength, defeating this Ragnarok is absolutely—impossible!」

The moment the two sides crossed, Lux whispered with a cool-headed glint reflected in his eyes.

「Hayes, you said, just try it right?」

Yggdrasil's horn—the tip that was generating shockwave hit Lux's large sword.

Impact that was incomparable with everything from before burst out and Lux's body should be blown away—but.

• BIKliiill-!*

The thrusting horn instantly snapped, then immediately after, cracks ran through Yggdrasil's whole body.

「.....Wha-!？」

Hayes raised a bewildered voice, at the same time Lux swung his large sword through.

「I absolutely—won't hand Philuffy to you. No matter how weak I am, never again.」

The created cracks increased in size and number with accelerating speed and the trunk was smashed up into pieces.

The giant flesh tree Ragnarok—Yggdrasil crumbled.

「—Ho, how!? How, is my Yggdrasil.....!？」

Hayes who lost the barrier of branch protecting herself whispered dumbfoundedly.

「That guy's life force should still be all right! It doesn't matter even if the opponent is a Divine Drag-Ride that is using Over Limit, it shouldn't pose any problem at all! My plan should be perfect! And yet—!？」

Lux was standing in front of the yelling Hayes who couldn't hide her shaken mind and he pointed his sword at her.

「Don't move, Hayes.」

「.....!？」

Hayes stiffened from receiving Lux's cold gaze that was lacking in emotion.

Hayes gritted her teeth hard, even so she showed a fearless smile and her hand was about to grasp the gem in her hand even tighter, it was then.

- zashu-!*

「Gu, aGAAAaH.....!」

Lux's sword quickly moved and destroyed the horn flute's gem inside that hand.

「You, bastard-.....!」

Hayes whose right hand was slashed glared at Lux with hatred-filled eyes. It was at that timing—

「We are retreating, your highness.」(TN: In the raw, it's your highness the imperial princess. It's too long so I shortened it)

That moment, a calm voice came down inside the dome.

The ceiling of the dome where the destroyed Yggdrasil was at.

From there two people, a male and a female came down and stood in the way of Lux and the others.

「Fugil.....!」

「Uh oh, I don't have any intention to quarrel with you. Your body is already at its limit anyway. If you force yourself more than that, you're going to die for real you know?」

Fugil also took out his Sword Device and took a stance as though to hold back Lux who was readying his Blade.

The strange scene from when Lux met Fugil before was brought back in Lux's mind.

「Wait Fugil! It's still not over yet! My subordinates are standing by nearby! This time for sure—」

「It's pointless, Hayes.」

Fugil returned a fearless smile towards Hayes whose face contorted in rage.

「You cannot defeat him. It looks like you didn't even notice why that guy intentionally strengthened Yggdrasil huh—」

「Wh, at.....!?」

Hayes's expression twitched hearing Fugil's words and she raised a stifled voice.

「A Ragnarok that devoured more than a hundred Abyss' life cannot be defeated by a Drag-Knight's strength no matter who. —That's why that guy made use of the ability and attack of none other than the Ragnarok itself, using that sword technique to receive the enemy's attack and reflect it back.」

「.....」

The special move that seized the starting point of an enemy's attack, and then countered by returning back that attack strength as it was—Critical Hit.

Lux held back from using that technique in this battle so that Yggdrasil wouldn't adapt against it, his last technique.

「Bu, but, even if he reflected Yggdrasil's attack back to itself, there was no way it could get done in just by—!」

「You're right. But, it's a different story if that Yggdrasil's attack power was magnified until nearly a hundred fold. He used Bahamut's Divine Raiment that was extremely reinforced by using Over Limit see.」

Yes—

That was Lux's aim.

Even the performance of Reload on Fire that was a Divine Raiment of compression reinforcement, because of Over Limit, it was strengthened to the degree that it was able to amplify an attack's original might until nearly a hundred times.

The attack power of the Ragnarok that Lux raised up until now, and even the Over Limit at the end, everything was the groundwork for this.

For the sake of destroying the strongest Abyss that no one could win against using its own strength—

「So you see Hayes, it's impossible. No matter what, something like a person who doesn't fear an enemy that is getting stronger endlessly—something like a person who doesn't hold any fear whatsoever in planning to actually make use of that strength to strike back at such enemy, there is no way such person exist. Except this terrifying weakest enemy in front of you.」

「.....」

Fugil averted his gaze from the speechless Hayes and gazed at Lux.

「You win the gamble. You saw through Hayes's trap, and yet you dared pretending getting caught in the trap, and chose the path to defeat the Ragnarok.」

For Hayes to not bring any minion while Philuffy was near meant that there was high likelihood that the main body of the parasite, Yggdrasil was also on this island.

If Hayes's objective was to enter the deepest room of the Ruin, then if a battle occurred—the probability was high that Yggdarsil would come to clash against Lux and the others.

In other words—the flow until this point where it looked like they got caught in Hayes's trap was Lux's plan to defeat Yggdrasil and save Philuffy.

Fugil saw through that.

「Now then, it's regretful, but we have to retreat soon. My bad, but we, too, have things to do.」

「Well then, please excuse us, everyone.」

The maid beside Fugil bowed, took Hayes in her arms, and then floated using an EX Wyvern along with Fugil.

Her emotionless eyes slightly reflected Krulcifer who was inside the room.

「.....」

Krulcifer also sent her gaze toward the female who was dressed as a maid.

But, a few seconds later, the maid flew away as though nothing had happened and vanished from the hole overhead.

「.....」

No one could chase because of their wounds.

Lux too lost consciousness after seeing them vanish.

Epilogue – Promise

“So, you hid the Limit Break [Over Limit] from me again, how are you going to explain this? My dear brother.”

“Well....”

In the academy’s infirmary, the smell of drugs and decorative flowers in the room created an indescribably subtle atmosphere.

With his entire body wrapped in bandages, unable to move, Lux was being scolded by his sister Airi.

—It had been a week since they came back from Lies island. Lux had returned to the academy with everyone.

After that, Lux had no memory about escaping from the “Ark”.

Due to the side effect of Limit Break [Over Limit], causing extreme fatigue and physical burden, he was unconscious for a full three days.

Waking up to see Airi with moist eyes made Lux reflect on his actions.

But now she was very calm, grumbling and complaining at Lux.

The [Ark] had vanished, no one knew its location.

The automatic doll Ra Kruse also disappeared inside the [Ark].

The New Kingdom had formed a blockage on all sea routes to investigate the [Ark], but due to the [Ark] characteristics of moving at sea, the search had proven itself to be difficult.

Relie was summoned to the Queen right after the event, but the punishment had yet to pass, for now she was detained with a serious warning.

Presumably in order to avoid problem in the next international event organized by the school — the [Dragon War] where foreign countries would

gather, measures were being taken to prevent chaos.

Right now ——

"Airi-chan."

Suddenly a small voice was heard.

Lying on the bed next to Lux's, Philuffy supported herself up.

"Reprimanding on poor him, again?"

".....u"

Being stared by that innocent eyes, Airi faltered in confusion.

How thoughtful, it was well known that Airi was not good at conveying feeling directly, unlike the frank Philuffy.

"Come, compare to these, soon it would be time for the School War and the Founding of New Kingdom memorial, we shouldn't be too conspicuous——"

The Founding of New Kingdom memorial was held in the summer months after the demise of the Old Empire.

The revolution and the memorial were next to each other, although they were determined to go to the capital, Lux was the sinner of the Old Empire and would find it difficult to walk around in broad daylight.

Airi must had felt uneasy.

"On that matter——I decided to accept the good will of Lisha-sama."

"Eh.....?"

Lux's statement made Airi froze in place.

"Because I was asked and she also wanted me to be her knight too——"

"Wait a minute!? What happened!? We cannot stand out, I told you that till my mouth was sour!?"

"Well, I understand what Airi wants to say....."

Looked at Lux smiling wryly, Airi stood up.

"That's not a problem. To become the exclusive knight of Lisha-sama means

—“

“Yes. I understand. It’s just that—”

Staring at the dissatisfied Airi, Lux honestly explained.

“Because I think that is something I can do.”

“Haa.... As expect my brother is my brother after all”

Airi suddenly lowered her shoulders feebly, sighing and muttered.

“I’ve got to go. There are ancient documents just found in the management room area, I would like to look at them a bit.”

“We, also will be busy. Celes-senpai’s parent—the Four Great Nobles family Ralgris seems to have something to discuss with me.”

“Please refuse them firmly.”

Airi smiled and went away.

After the door closed, the room suddenly returned to its calm.

Philuffy, who ate a fruit silently next to him, glanced at Lux.

“The chest wound, has it healed?”

With only two people, Lux asked about the Abyss [Ragnarok] parasite—Asked about Ratatosk.

The main source Yggdrasill had been eliminated, it seemed she would no longer be controlled.

“Yes. As long as I don’t force myself there is no problem. And also, after getting used to the flute I can resist it, there is always a way.”

Repeated use of the flute on the same Abyss would cause the body to have a certain degree of resistance.

And if she had a half human body, as long as she did not stop training, there would be no need to worry about being manipulated.

However, this was after all coming from a normal academy, Relie who had the full-detailed information of this, did not convey the matter to the New Kingdom. However, even so—“Really,— That’s good.”

“.....”

Lux hung his head in tears. Philuffy slowly rose up from her bed, went over in her pajama.

“You becomes a knight of Her Royal Highness, is that true?”

Philuffy inquired with the usual serious expression.

“Yes.....they’ve also sent a letter to others during my absence. The officials in the Capital praised my achievements and intend to hand out a award—— this is what I think I want to do”

“.....”

“Although it would take time for the Capital and the local nobles to accept it, I cannot escape the crisis of the new kingdom. Moreover ——“

“For me?”

“E——?”

“I was exposed as an [Abyss], so to make them silent, right?”

“.....”

She found out.

She always expressed nothing at all, usually looked like an airhead.

“When Lu-chan worries about things, you’ll immediate be expose.”

As a result, he had been seen through by his childhood friend.

“Sorry, at that time, I didn’t protect you——“

He hung his head and spit out the words

“But, this time I will absolutely protect you! I promise you that time! I will create a peaceful country for Airi and Philuffy to live a happy life——E?”

A floating, sweet scent itched in his nasal, and then a soft feeling bloomed in him.

Philuffy, sitting next to Lux, clung tightly to Lux.

“Phi.....chan?”

"I, am fine."

Philuffy exposed a gentle smile she only showed to those she was closed with and softly whispered.

"Lu-chan is already protecting that promise?"

"E.....?"

"My home, is right here. Because Lu-chan has done a good job creating one for me."

"....."

"Thank you, Lu-chan. I very, like you."

Philuffy gently embraced Lux, who could not speak.

During that warm time.

Something had changed, Lux had found something precious.

Afterword

It's been a long time. This is Akatsuki Senri.

Finally I can publish the series' fourth volume. Thank you very much.

I think it has been around three years since I was able to publish the fourth volume of a series? This too is earnestly thanks to all of you honored readers.

Recently, the passage of time was really fast, wasn't it?

And so, I went to the dentist again after a year when usually I would go to the dentist in a half a year cycle.

I got cavity (sniff) .

.....Carelessness is the greatest enemy.

Well, it was just a tiny little thing that I didn't even notice, so its treatment was over without delay, but before there was always nothing each time I went for examination every half a year, but when I neglected it, it turned out like this.

When people are planning to do as usual, they will get careless bit by bit, or an opening will be created while they don't realize it. I felt it keenly from this.

So that everyone will still accompany this series from the fifth volume onwards, I'm thinking that I want to do my best with Bahamut. It's also for the memorial service of my whittled tooth.

And so, let's enter into the thanks for this time.

Kasuga Ayumu-sama who is in charge of the illustrations this time too.

While you are always greatly busy, you drew wonderful illustration of many characters' swimsuit figured and Drag-Rided and so on, thank you very much.

The character illustration of this time's main, Philuffy is very lovely that I couldn't hide my excitement.

(.....Of course I refer to the Drag-Ride illustration you know?)

The one in charge of me Satou-sama. I'm sorry that every time my progress always just barely finished.

I'm sorry that this time it was pressing it more than usual. I want to do something about it (do it).

It will be great if next time I can meet all of you honored readers again with some more leeway.

A certain day in June 2014 Akatsuki Senri